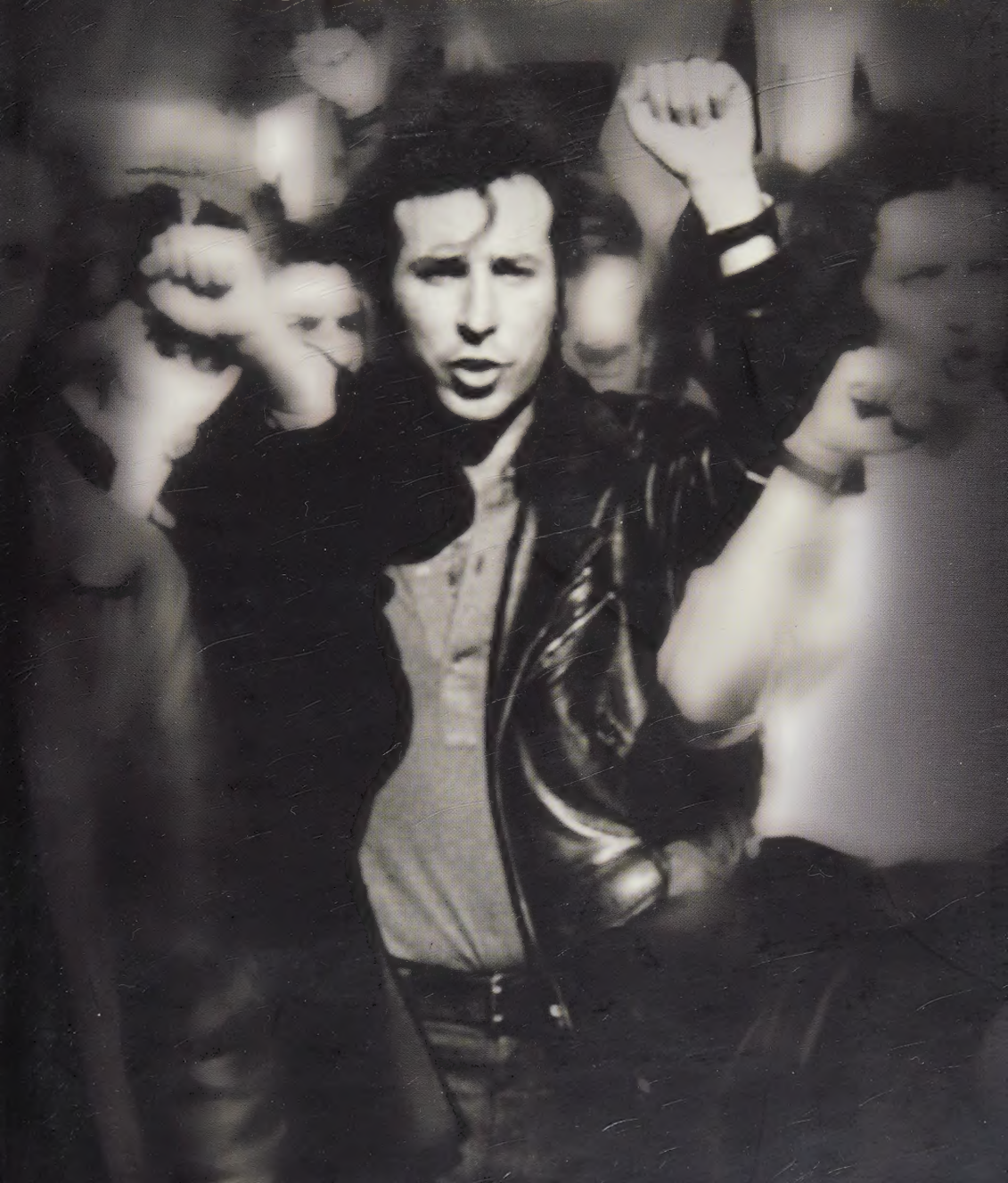


AN IMPATIENT LIFE

A MEMOIR


DANIEL BENSÄÏD

FOREWORD BY TARIQ ALI



A philosopher and activist, eager to live according to ideals forged in study and discussion, Daniel Bensaïd was a man deeply entrenched in both the French and the international left. Raised in a staunchly red neighbourhood of Toulouse, where his family owned a bistro, he grew to be France's leading Marxist public intellectual, much in demand on talk shows and in the press. A lyrical essayist and powerful public speaker, at his best expounding large ideas to crowds of students and workers, he was a founder member of the Ligue Communiste and thrived at the heart of a resurgent far left in the 1960s, which nurtured many of the leading figures of today's French establishment.

The path from the joyous explosion of May 1968, through the painful experience of defeat in Latin America and the world-shaking collapse of the USSR, to the neoliberal world of today, dominated as it is by global finance, is narrated in **AN IMPATIENT LIFE** with Bensaïd's characteristic elegance of phrase and clarity of vision. His memoir relates a life of ideological and practical struggle, a never-resting endeavour to comprehend the workings of capitalism in the pursuit of revolution.



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AN IMPATIENT LIFE

AN IMPATIENT LIFE: A POLITICAL MEMOIR

DANIEL BENSAÏD

Translated by David Fernbach

With a Foreword by Tariq Ali



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Foreword: A Letter from Atlantis

by
Tariq Ali

Successful revolutions always try to reproduce themselves. They usually fail. Napoleon carried the Enlightenment on the end of a bayonet, but English reaction, Spanish nationalism and Russian absolutism, finally defeated him. The triumphant Bolsheviks, disgusted by social-democratic capitulation at the advent of the First World War, orchestrated a split within the working class and formed the Communist International to extend the victory in Petrograd to the entire world. They were initially more successful than the French. Premature uprisings wrecked the revolution in Germany, destroying its finest leaders – Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht and many others – and driving the German landed and bourgeois elite into Hitler's embrace. In Spain, a united front of the European fascist powers (passively assisted by Britain and France) brought Franco to power. In France and Italy, the Communist platoons grew into huge battalions during the Second World War and exercised an unchallenged hegemony within the working class for three decades, but without any meaningful strategy to dismantle capitalism. Here the close alliance with the narrowly defined needs of the Soviet state precluded any such possibility. Communists in China and Vietnam proved more successful, for a while. The Cuban revolution, the last till now, was no exception. Its leaders, too, were convinced that careful organisation and a handful of armed cadres could succeed anywhere in South America. It was a tragic error, costing the lives of Che Guevara and hundreds of others across the continent.

The Stalinisation of the Soviet Union and the execution of most of Lenin's closest comrades led to the creation of dissident Communist

groupuscules self-defined as Trotskyists. From Europe to China, these included some of the finest minds in their respective countries. South America, by contrast, tended to produce slightly eccentric equivalents. Britain had never experienced a mass Communist party. It made up for this by producing some of the most virulent sects within the Trotskyist framework. The late historian E.P. Thompson had one of these in mind when he described English Trotskyists as little more than stunted opposites of Stalinism, who had in their own practice reproduced the structures pioneered by those they claimed to oppose.

In France, where dissidence fermented inside the ideological vats of the Parti Communiste Français, the results were different. The intellectual and political culture was rigid, but its influence on the French left-wing intelligentsia as a whole provoked debates and discussions that were on a higher theoretical level than elsewhere (with the exception of Italy). After the Cuban revolution and during the Algerian war of independence, many young intellectuals inside the student wing of the PCF began to find its politics stifling. This led to the creation of the Jeunesse Communiste Révolutionnaire and its merger with the least sectarian wing of Trotskyism, led by Pierre Frank and Ernest Mandel. Reading this book brought back many nice memories of comrades who formed the core of the JCR, some of whom are still good friends. The first half of these memoirs also constitutes the intellectual history of the 68 generation. It's amazing now to be reminded how many of those active in the political and cultural establishment of contemporary France were once on the far left. The JCR's big rival within the Trotskyist world was the Organisation Communiste Internationaliste, combining a rigid sectarianism with an elastic opportunism. Some of its central figures were asked by Mitterrand to join the Socialist Party. He needed them to combat the PCF and its residual Stalinism. Who better to approach than the OCI? And so Jospin became the prime minister of France. Running into Krivine at some occasion, Jospin shook his hand warmly and whispered in his ear: 'I always told your lot that we would take power before you'.

It is not easy to write in times of defeat, in an epoch where the triumph of Capital (the real thing, not the great book) has frightened the young away from posing an effective challenge via a carefully considered alternative. Those who assumed, stupidly, that with the fall of the Soviet Union the road was clear for a real, pure socialism,

gravely underestimated the tectonic shift. Bensaïd was not one of this crowd. He grappled with real problems till the very end of his life. Ernest Mandel's optimism of the will and optimism of the intellect had created within the ranks of the European far left a belief that revolution was on the horizon. The events of 1968 fuelled such a view. We were all believers. As Daniel writes, it was this belief that burnt out the large Spanish group of Trotskyists. They were demobilised by the peaceful transition from a right-wing republic to a social-democratic monarchy. The country in Europe that came closest to a revolution was Portugal, but here too, a clever social democrat outwitted (DB might have called it *débordement* – unity in action to outflank and overtake) the groups to his left.

Reading much of this material today is like delving into the archives of Atlantis. With official Communism dead, how could its Trotskyist offspring survive? There were two solutions: the first was to launch a new broader party of the left, the second to retreat into a bubble of its own making and insist that everyone sing from the same hymn-sheet.

So much for the politics, what of the author? Daniel Bensaïd was one of the most gifted European Marxist intellectuals of his generation. Born in Toulouse in 1946, he was schooled at the Lycées Bellevue and Fermat, but the formative influence was that of his parents and their milieu. His father, Haïm Bensaïd, was a Sephardic Jew from a poor family in Algeria who moved from Mascara to Oran, where he got a job as a waiter in a café and after a short spell discovered his real vocation. He trained to be a boxer, becoming the welterweight champion of North Africa.

Daniel's mother, Marthe Starck, was a strong and energetic Frenchwoman from a working-class family in Blois. At eighteen she moved to Oran. She met the boxer. They fell in love. The French *colons* were deeply shocked and tried hard to persuade her not to marry a Jew. She was, they warned, bound to get VD and have abnormal children. But Marthe was a strong-willed woman and, as Bensaïd records in his memoirs, capable of taking on anyone, including, much later, her son's collaborationist headmaster when he attempted to discipline the boy for his anti-fascist opinions.

With France occupied by the German fascists and the bulk of the country's elite in collaborationist mode, with its own capital at Vichy, the French administration fell into line. As a Jew, Daniel's

father was arrested and held at the Drancy internment camp pending deportation to Auschwitz. But unlike his two brothers, he survived, thanks largely to his wife who had an official Vichy certificate stating her 'non-membership of the Jewish race'. In this affecting book, Daniel notes that these barbarities had taken place on French soil only a few decades prior to 1968. Le Bar des Amis, he writes, was a cosmopolitan location. Spanish refugees, Italian anti-fascists, former Resistance fighters, workers, post workers, railway workers. The local Communist Party branch held meetings there. Given his mother's fierce Republican and Jacobin views (when a relative, after watching a syrupy French TV programme on the British monarchy, expressed doubts regarding the guillotining of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette, Marthe did not speak to him for ten years), it would have been odd if young Bensaïd had become a monarchist. His father died of cancer in 1960.

Angered by the massacre of demonstrators at the Métro Charonne in 1961 (ordered by Maurice Papon, chief of police and former Nazi collaborator), Daniel joined the Union of Communist Students. But he soon became irritated by party orthodoxy and joined a left opposition within the Union organised by Henri Weber (currently a Socialist Party senator in the upper house) and Alain Krivine. The Cuban revolution and Che Guevara's odyssey did the rest. The dissidents were expelled from the Party in 1966. That same year, Bensaïd was admitted to the École Normale Supérieure in Saint-Cloud and moved to Paris. Here he helped found the Jeunesse Communiste Révolutionnaire (JCR), young dissidents inspired by Che and Trotsky, which later morphed into the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR).

In 1968, together with Daniel Cohn-Bendit, he formed the 22 March Movement in Nanterre, the organisation that helped to detonate the uprising which shook France in May–June of that year. Bensaïd was at his best explaining ideas to large crowds of students and workers. He could hold an audience spellbound, as I witnessed in his native Toulouse in 1969 when we shared a platform at a rally of ten thousand people to support Alain Krivine's presidential campaign. His penetrating analysis was never presented in a patronising way, whatever the composition of the audience. His ideas derived from classical Marxism – Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg, as was typical in those days – but his way of looking at and presenting them was his own. His philosophical and political writings have a lyrical ring

– at particularly tedious central committee meetings he was seen immersed in Proust – and resist easy translation into English.

As a leader of the LCR and the Fourth International to which it was affiliated, he travelled a great deal to South America, especially Brazil, and played an important part in helping to organise the Workers Party (PT) that subsequently came to power under Lula. An imprudent sexual encounter shortened his life. He contracted AIDS and for the last sixteen years of his life was dependent on drugs to keep him going, but with fatal side effects: a cancer that finally killed him.

Physically, he was a shadow of his former self, but the intellect was not affected and he produced over a dozen books on politics and philosophy. He wrote of his Jewishness and that of many other comrades, emphasising how this cultural identity had never led him, nor most of them, to follow the path of a blind and unthinking Zionism that was also deeply reactionary. For former Communists turned Zionists, it was Israel now that had to be supported, right or wrong. DB disliked identity politics and his last two books – *Fragments mécréants* (An Unbeliever's Discourse) and *Eloge de la politique profane* (In Praise of Secular Politics) – explained how this had become a substitute for serious critical thought. He was France's leading Marxist public intellectual, much in demand on talk shows and frequently writing essays and reviews for *Le Monde* and *Libération*. At a time when a large section of the French intelligentsia had shifted its terrain and embraced neoliberalism, Bensaid remained steadfast. Even in the sixties he had avoided the clichés of left-talk; instead, he thought creatively, often questioning the verities of the far left. What would he have made of the travails of the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste – sectarian and economistic, reduced to warring factions, incapable of linking to a larger movement?

If there was a weakness in Daniel it was this: even when he knew that mistakes (some of them serious) were being committed by his organisation, he would never stand up and contest the will of the majority. Whatever else, neither Lenin nor Trotsky were reticent in pointing out, when necessary, that what was being proposed was politically unacceptable. I did put this to him once. He smiled but did not reply. Perhaps he thought that in a climate where Marxism was under heavy siege, it was best to be emollient within his organisation. His project was clear: to help create a non-dogmatic, non-religious, non-bullshit Marxism. This was not an easy task in bad times, but as

Sebastian Budgen, one of his friends from a younger generation, noted in a moving obituary:

Perhaps most importantly for him, Daniel also doggedly pursued a project of developing Marxist theory by cross-fertilising it with other radical currents (such as those influenced by Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Badiou), and by seeking to transmit in a critical, open but unapologetic manner the wealth of Marxism's past to a younger generation he hoped would forge a future for it.

The last time I met Daniel, a few years ago in his favourite café in the Latin Quarter, he was in full flow. The disease had not sapped his will to live or think. Politics was his life-blood. We talked about the social unrest in France and whether it would be enough to bring about serious change. He shrugged his shoulders. 'Perhaps not in our lifetimes, but we carry on fighting. What else is there to do?' This was the spirit that animated his life as it does this book, making it one of the more intelligent and unrepentant accounts of the French far left.

July 2013

Publisher's Note

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List of Abbreviations

AC!	Agir ensemble contre le chômage – radical unemployed rights campaign group which organised a march against unemployment across France in 1994.
ALCA	Área de Libre Comercio de América – Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA).
ANDEVA	Association nationale de défense des victimes de l'amiante – campaign for the rights of victims of asbestos poisoning.
ATTAC	Association pour la taxation des transactions pour l'aide aux citoyens – Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions for the Aid of Citizens, main French 'alterglobalist' campaign group.
AZF	AZote Fertilisant – the site in Toulouse of an accidental explosion on 21 September 2001.
CADTM	Comité pour l'annulation de la dette du tiers monde – Committee for the Abolition of Third World Debt.
CAL	Comités d'action lycéens – committees of radical secondary school students founded in December 1967 by dissident Jeunesse Communiste members.
CAPES	Certificat d'aptitude au professorat de l'enseignement du second degré – secondary school teaching diploma.
CEMEA	Centre d'étude des méthodes d'éducation active – organisation promoting 'active pedagogical' methods and 'new education' more generally.
CERES	Centre d'études, de recherche et d'éducation – left current in the PS around Jean-Pierre Chèvenement which sought to trace an authentically socialist path against social democracy and orthodox Communism (with references to Gramsci, Austro-Marxism, etc.).

	Became the Socialisme et République current in 1986, which quit the PS in 1991 to found the MDC.
CERFI	Centre d'études, de recherche et de formation institutionnelles – interdisciplinary collective of scholars and activists founded by Félix Guattari in 1967. The journal it published was called <i>Recherches</i> .
CFDT	Confédération française démocratique du travail – one of the two largest union confederations in France. Originally a split from the Catholic CFTC, in the 1970s it developed a discourse around <i>autogestion</i> , or self-management, which attracted many far left activists. Now a very centrist and moderate current in the labour movement.
CGT	Confédération générale du travail – union confederation founded in 1895 and originally associated with revolutionary syndicalism. After the reunification with the CGTU, came under the influence of the PCF. Now one of the top two union confederations with a somewhat more militant discourse than the CFDT.
CGTU	Confédération générale du travail unitaire – 'red union' split from the CGT that existed between 1921 and 1936.
CNRS	Centre national de la recherche scientifique – main public-funded research centre for both natural and social sciences.
CNT	Confederación Nacional del Trabajo – Spanish anarcho-syndicalist union confederation.
CORQI	Comité pour la reconstruction de la quatrième internationale – Committee for the Reconstruction of the Fourth International, Lambertist international current, formed after the expulsion of the OCI from the ICFI in 1971.
CUARH	Comité d'urgence anti-répresseion homosexuelle – campaign group against homophobia that lasted from 1979 to 1987.
DINA	Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional – Chilean secret service under Pinochet.
EDF	Électricité de France – French public electricity company.
EGP	Ejercito guerrillero del pueblo – People's Guerrilla Army, established by Cuban press agency Prensa Latina's founding director Jorge Masetti (like Che

Guevara, Argentinian) in 1963 at Salta, Argentina, a province in the Northwest that borders Bolivia, Chile and Paraguay, as part of the preparations for Guevara's Bolivian foco. It dissolved, defeated, in 1964, with the death in the jungle of its founder.

ELN Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional de Bolivia – National Liberation Army, guerrilla group best known for its relationship with Che Guevara.

ENA École nationale d'administration – National School of Administration, élite institution which trains future high-level civil servants.

ENSET École normale supérieure de l'enseignement technique – previous name for the École normale supérieure at Cachan.

ERP Ejercito Revolucionario del Pueblo – armed wing of the PRT.

ETA Euskadi Ta Askatasuna – Basque Homeland and Freedom, armed wing of the Basque nationalist movement.

FAS Frente Anti-imperialista y por el Socialismo – Anti-Imperialist and Socialist Front, short-lived convergence of Argentinean revolutionary organisations, 1973–74.

FEN Fédération de l'éducation nationale – main federation of teachers' unions until the split in 1992 that founded the FSU. Now called UNSA éducation.

FHAR Front homosexuel d'action révolutionnaire – Homosexual Front for Revolutionary Action, radical gay and lesbian political group founded in 1971 that included Daniel Guérin, Christine Delphy, René Schérer and Guy Hocquenghem amongst its members.

FI Fourth International – founded by Trotsky in 1938. The FI split several times, most importantly in 1953, between the International Secretariat of the Fourth International (Michel Pablo, Ernest Mandel, Pierre Frank) and the International Committee of the Fourth International, around the SWP (US) of James P. Cannon. Reunification of the two currents in 1963 in the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI or Usec) took place without the followers of Pablo, Juan Posadas in Latin America, Gerry Healy in the UK, Pierre Lambert in France and other groups. (The

Lambertist current internationally still calls itself the 'Fourth International' and is often known as the FI [La Vérité] or FI [International Secretariat]). The SWP (US) distanced itself increasingly from the USFI in the 1980s and broke formally from it in 1990. The USFI is organised as follows: the International Committee (previously International Executive Committee), on which sit representatives of all the national sections and sympathising organisations, meets once a year; the International Secretariat (previously United Secretariat) brings together ten to fifteen representatives of the most important sections three or four times a year; the Bureau is the permanent executive and is based in Paris.

- FI-IC Fourth International-International Committee, short-lived regroupment of the Lambertist CORQI, the Morenoite Bolshevik Faction (which split from the USFI in 1979) and the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency, from 1980 to 1982.
- FLN Front de libération nationale – Algerian national liberation movement.
- FSU Fédération syndicale unitaire – currently the most important teachers' union federation in France, often associated with the more 'militant' organisations such as the CGT and Solidaires.
- FTP Francs-tireurs et partisans – wing of the French Resistance under the command of the PCF.
- FTP-MOI Francs-tireurs et partisans-main-d'œuvre immigrée – the immigrant unit of the FTP.
- FZLN Frente zapatista de liberación nacional – Zapatista National Liberation Front.
- GOP Gauche ouvrière et paysanne – Workers' and Peasants' Left, left-wing current within the PSU in the early 1970s that split in several waves from the latter, to constitute itself independently in 1975. Some members went on to join the Maoists, others the OCT.
- GOR Grupo Obrero Revolucionario – Revolutionary Workers' Group, split from the Argentinian PRT in 1970 led by Daniel Pereyra.
- GPU Gosudarstvennoye politicheskoye upravlenie – State Political Directorate, forerunner of the KGB.

GRU	Glavnoye razvedyvatel'noye upravleniye – Main Intelligence Directorate, Soviet foreign military intelligence service.
IA	Izquierda Anticapitalista – section of the USFI in the Spanish state, founded in 2008
IC	Izquierda comunista – group founded by Andreu Nin, later integrated into the POUM.
ICFI	International Committee of the Fourth International, international current of 'anti-Pabloite' Trotskyists, founded in 1953, initially grouping together the SWP (US), Gerry Healy's current (Socialist Labour League, later the Workers' Revolutionary Party) and the French Lambertists. In 1963 the SWP and the smaller Austrian, Canadian, Chinese and New Zealand sections of the ICFI agreed to reunite with the ISFI at the World Congress, to form the United Secretariat of the Fourth International. In opposition to this, the ICFI drew in James Robertson (later of the International Spartacist League) and Tim Wohlforth (later the leader of the US 'Healyite' organisation). Robertson soon left the ICFI and the Lambertists left in 1971 to found the CORQI.
IG Metall	Industriegewerkschaft Metall – Industrial Union of Metalworkers, Germany.
IIRE	International Institute for Research and Education, based in Amsterdam.
ISFI	International Secretariat of the Fourth International. See FI.
JCR	Jeunesse communiste révolutionnaire – Revolutionary Communist Youth, youth wing of the PCI, founded April 1965. Dissolved officially by the French state in June 1968 but continued to exist informally and fused in April 1969 with the PCI to form the Ligue Communiste, French section of the FI.
LC	Ligue communiste – Communist League, French section of the FI, founded at the Mannheim congress, 5–8 April 1969. Officially dissolved by the French state in June 1973 after the violent demonstration against the Ordre Nouveau meeting.
LCR	Liga Comunista Revolucionaria – Revolutionary Communist League, section of the FI in the Spanish

	state, founded in 1971. Fused with revolutionary communist split from ETA, to become LCR-ETA(VI). Fused in 1991 with the Maoist organisation Movimiento Comunista to found Izquierda Alternativa (Alternative Left), which broke up in 1993.
LCR	Ligue communiste révolutionnaire – reconstitution (after a two-month existence following the dissolution of the LC as the Front communiste révolutionnaire) of the LC under a new name in 1974. Dissolved itself into the NPA in 2009.
LIT	Liga Internacional de los Trabajadores (Cuarta Internacional) – International Workers' League (Fourth International), Morenoite international current, founded in 1982 after a dispute with the Lambertists in the Parity Committee for the Reconstruction of the Fourth International, subsequently the FI-IC.
MAS	Movimiento al socialismo – Movement towards Socialism, Argentinean Trotskyist party founded by Nahuel Moreno in 1982. Split into many fragments in 1988 and onwards.
MDC	Mouvement des citoyens – Citizens' Movement, party founded by Jean-Pierre Chevènement in 1993. Rebaptised Mouvement Républicain et Citoyen (MRC) in 2003.
MEDEF	Mouvement des entreprises de France – French employers' confederation, founded in 1998 to replace the CNPF.
MIR	Movimiento de la izquierda revolucionaria – Movement of the Revolutionary Left, Chilean far left party founded in 1965 as the product of a fusion between various revolutionary groups, including Trotskyists. Viciously repressed during the dictatorship.
MLN-T	Movimiento de liberación nacional-tupamaros – Tupamaros National Liberation Movement, urban guerrilla movement in Uruguay.
MNEF	Mutuelle nationale des étudiants de France – non-profit mutual insurance company established by the UNEF for the purpose of providing French students with health insurance.
MOI	Main-d'oeuvre immigrée – immigrant workers' union founded by the CGTU. Created an armed Resistance wing FTP-MOI during Second World War.

MRAP	Mouvement contre le racisme et pour l'amitié entre les peuples – Movement Against Racism and for Friendship between Peoples, anti-racist organisation founded in 1949 by former Resistance fighters and deportees.
MST	Movimiento Socialista de los Trabajadores – Workers' Socialist Movement, one of the fragments of the break-up of the MAS, founded in 1992.
MTP	Movimiento todos por la patria – All For the Country Movement, Argentinean political and urban guerrilla movement founded by Enrique Gorriarán Merlo in 1986. Organised a major and bloody assault on a military installation in 1989, after which the organisation disappeared.
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NKVD	Narodnyy komissariat vnutrennikh del – People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, successor of the GPU and forerunner of the KGB.
NPA	Nouveau parti anticapitaliste – New Anti-Capitalist Party, founded in 2009 by the fusion of the LCR with a number of smaller groups and a large influx of previously unaffiliated individuals.
OAS	Organisation de l'armée secrète – Organisation of the Secret Army, clandestine anti-Algerian independence group founded in 1961. Organised many terrorist actions against the state and the left until 1965.
OCI	Organisation communiste internationaliste – Internationalist Communist Organisation, Trotskyist party founded in 1965 by Pierre Lambert, who had been expelled from the PCI along with other opponents of the positions of Michel Pablo in 1952. Changed its name to Parti Communiste Internationaliste in 1981, Mouvement pour un Parti des Travailleurs in 1984, Parti des Travailleurs in 1991 and Parti Ouvrier Indépendant in 2008.
OCT	Organisation communiste des travailleurs – Communist Workers' Organisation, fusion between the organisation Révolution! (originally from the LC) and members of the GOP in 1976. Broke up in 1981, with a number of members joining subsequently the LCR.
OLAS	Organización Latino Americana de Solidaridad – Organisation of Latin American Solidarity

PCB	Partido Comunista Boliviano – Bolivian Communist Party
PCE	Partido Comunista de España – Communist Party of Spain
PCF	Parti communiste français – French Communist Party
PCI	Parti communiste internationaliste – Internationalist Communist Party, French section of the FI, founded in 1944 as a fusion of the three major Trotskyist organisations (but not the Union Communiste Internationaliste, which would later become Lutte Ouvrière). The minority around Pierre Frank expelled the anti-Pablo majority, including Pierre Lambert in 1952. Fused with the JCR in 1969 to create the LC.
PDS	Partei des demokratischen Sozialismus – Party of Democratic Socialism, successor to the East German ruling SED party. In 2007, fused with forces from western Germany to found Die Linke.
PFLP	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
POC	Partido Obrero Comunista – Communist Workers' Party, Brazilian far left organisation founded at the end of the 1960s. Its armed wing was called Organização de Combate Marxista-Leninista – Política Operária (OCML-PO). Heavily repressed by the military dictatorship and disappeared in the early 1970s.
POUM	Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista – Workers' Party of Marxist Unification, revolutionary organisation in the Spanish state, founded as the fusion between the Trotskyist Communist Left of Spain (Izquierda Comunista de España, ICE) and the Workers' and Peasants' Bloc (Bloque Obrero y Campesino, BOC) in 1935. Attacked and driven underground by the Communist-led Republican forces in May 1937.
PRD	Partido de la Revolución Democrática – Party of the Democratic Revolution, Mexican centre-left party founded in 1989.
PRT	Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (Argentina) – Workers' Revolutionary Party, revolutionary organisation founded in 1965 as the fusion of the Revolutionary and Popular Amerindian Front (Frente Revolucionario Indoamericano Popular [FRIP]), led by Francisco René

	Santucho and his brother Mario Roberto Santucho, and Worker's Word (Palabra Obrera [PO]). Was affiliated to the FI between 1968 and 1973. Its armed wing was the ERP. Was heavily repressed and disappeared in 1977.
PRT	Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (Mexico) – the Mexican section of the Fourth International, founded in 1977 as the fusion of the USFI and Morenoite sections. After a tumultuous history, the PRT declined and its remnants were renamed Convergencia Socialista (Socialist Convergence) in 1996.
PSOE	Partido Socialista Obrero Español – Spanish Socialist Workers' Party, Spanish social-democratic party
PSOL	Partido Socialismo e Liberdade – Party for Socialism and Freedom, regroupment of several far left forces in Brazil, including those expelled from the PT, founded in 2004.
PST	Partido Socialista de Trabajadores – Argentinean Socialist Workers' Party, product of a fusion between Moreno's PRT-La Verdad and the Socialist Party of Argentina in 1973. Became the MAS in 1983.
PSTU	Partido Socialista dos Trabalhadores Unificado – Unified Socialist Workers' Party, Brazilian section of the LIT, founded in 1993 as the fusion between the Morenoite Convergencia Socialista and a number of other far left groups.
PSU	Parti socialiste unifié – Unified Socialist Party, socialist party to the left of social democracy founded as a fusion of several groups in 1960. Contained many different tendencies, but the right wing grouped around Michel Rocard joined the Socialist Party in 1974. After a long decline in the late 1970s and the 1980s, the remnants of the PSU joined with other forces to become what is now known as Les Alternatifs.
PT	Parti des travailleurs (France) – see OCI
PT	Partido del Trabajo (Mexico) – Labour Party, centre-left party founded in 1990. In alliance with the PRD.
PT	Partido dos Trabalhadores (Brazil) – Workers' Party, main centre-left party in Brazil.
PtyD	Partido del Trabajo y el Desarrollo – Party for Work and Development, moderate Argentinean party launched

	in 2005 by Enrique Haroldo Gorriarán Merlo, previously of the PRT-ERP and MTP.
RPF	Rassemblement du peuple français – Rally of the French People, party founded by the Général de Gaulle in 1947. Disbanded in 1955.
RSDLP	Russian Social Democratic and Labour Party
SAPD	Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands – left-wing breakaway from German social democracy in 1931, which also included Communist dissidents, and was associated with the International Revolutionary Marxist Centre. Most famous member was Willy Brandt.
SDEUM	Sindicato Democrático de Estudiantes Universitarios de Madrid – Democratic Students' Union of Madrid University
SDS	Sozialistischer deutscher Studentenbund – German Socialist Student Union, founded in 1946 as the university arm of the SPD but expelled in 1961. Became leading force in the Außerparlamentarische Opposition (APO; 'Extraparliamentary Opposition') and anti-war movement. Rudi Dutschke was the most famous of its figures. Disbanded in 1970.
SFIO	Section française de l'internationale ouvrière – French Section of the Workers' International, French socialist party, product of a fusion under pressure from the Second International in 1905 of the French Socialist Party and the Socialist Party of France. Suffered a major split in 1920 at the Tours Congress with the foundation of the French Communist Party. Discredited especially by its behaviour during the Fourth Republic, it was replaced by the Parti Socialiste, founded in 1969.
SNES	Syndicat national de l'enseignement de second degré – major secondary schoolteachers' union, part of the FSU.
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands – Social Democratic Party of Germany
SUD-PTT	Solidaires unitaires démocratiques – Postes télégrammes et télécommunications – independent left trade union well implanted in the post and telecoms sector. A member of the left confederation Union syndi-

cale Solidaires.

- SWP Socialist Workers' Party (USA)
- UEC Union des étudiants communistes – Union of Communist Students, student organization of the PCF. Reactivated in 1956, it quickly became a pole of gravitation for different dissident groups and there were major waves of expulsions in 1965 and 1966. Was severely weakened as a force after May 1968 due to the competition from organizations of the far left.
- UFF Union des femmes françaises – Union of French Women, women's organization founded in 1944 and led by Jeannette Vermeersch, wife of Maurice Thorez, general secretary of the PCF, and known for her prudish and conservative attitudes towards sexuality, contraception and abortion. Renamed Femmes solidaires in 1998.
- UFRGS Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul – Federal University of Rio Grande del Sul in Brazil
- UGOCP Unión General Obrero, Campesino y Popular – General Workers, Peasants' and Peoples' Union, Mexican peasants' organization founded in 1986.
- UGS Union de la gauche socialiste – Union of the Socialist Left, convergence, founded in 1957, of dissident SFIO members, left Catholics, intellectuals (Edgar Morin, Claude Bourdet, Gilles Martinet) and figures from the Trotskyist movement (Yvan Craipeau, Pierre Naville, Marcel Bleibtreu and Michel Lequenne). Participated in the creation of the PSU in 1960.
- UJCML Union des jeunesses communistes marxistes-léninistes – Union of Marxist-Leninist Communist Youth, Maoist organization founded in 1966 by students expelled from the UEC (including Benny Lévy and Robert Linhart). Dissolved by the state in June 1968. A minority went on to found the Gauche prolétarienne whilst the majority joined the Parti communiste marxiste-léniniste de France (PCMLF) or went on to found Vive la Révolution.
- UMP Union pour un mouvement populaire – Union for a Popular Movement, main centre-right party in France, founded in 2002 and merging several forces, especially

the RPR and the UDF.

- UNE União Nacional dos Estudantes – Brazilian National Union of Students
- UNED Universidad Española de Educación a Distancia – Spanish University of Distance Learning
- UNEF Union nationale des étudiants de France – main French students' union, founded in 1907. During the 1970s, two main UNEFs coexisted: UNEF (Unité Syndicale) (UNEF-US), founded in 1971 and controlled by the Lambertists (with a Socialist tendency from 1978 onwards), and UNEF (Renouveau), controlled by the PCF with the participation of Mitterrand supporters and others. In 1980, UNEF-US fused with the Mouvement d'action syndicale (MAS), controlled by the LCR, to form UNEF Indépendante et démocratique (Unef-ID). In 2001, UNEF-ID and UNEF-Solidarité Étudiante (the new name for UNEF-Renouveau since the early 1980s) merged to refound a unitary UNEF.
- USFI United Secretariat of the Fourth International – see FI

Fourth Person Singular

A slow impatience. Something creeping on, you might say.

— George Steiner

I say 'we', and am unsure whom I am putting into this mixture.

— Erri de Luca

I hesitated for a long while before writing this book, which records a personal itinerary among the intellectual and political representatives of a generation. There is always something shameless in speaking about yourself, or perhaps an ulterior motive. And I hardly have the taste for testimony and confession. There is also the risk, in recording your memories, of pinching those of others and unjustly appropriating a shared experience.

In the days (the 1970s) when questioning the floating boundaries between public and private was considered the height of boldness, when 'putting your cards on the table' was seen as a liberating gesture, I preferred to keep my inner life below the waterline. That brought me some serious vexations. I also persevered in the conviction that transparency, unless it was transcendent (as an anonymous hand wrote on the plate-glass windows of Nanterre in May 68), could be deadly. All the more so, once electronic and televisual voyeurism became invasive. So long as individuals are exposed to the brutality of physical or verbal domination, the right of each person to their share of obscurity will remain indefeasible.

Any autobiographical revelation bears the mark of sin, and cannot avoid a bit of sharp practice. To 'portray oneself' is almost an impossible mission. 'No one can speak the truth about themselves': without being initiated into the chiaroscuro of the unconscious, the subtle Heine was nobody's fool. On his deathbed, however, he wrote his 'confessions'. This final disclosure was undoubtedly a sign of despair

and a cry for help. For Swann, too, so immersed in the arcana of convention and decency, it was only on suffering extreme distress that he committed the indelicacy, in the cruel scene of the red slippers, of trusting the Guermantes with the announcement of his impending death.

The old adventurer Raymond Molinier,^{*} when I suggested writing his life story, saw this as an insult. Such tales were alright for those hanging up their gloves. But while there's life, there's action. No retirement in the cause of revolution! Jules Fourier, veteran of the Popular Front, the Spanish war and the Resistance, an escapee from Mauthausen, only gave in to a similar proposal as if committing a shameless act.[†] These were men from before the age of the media, before the time of appearances that are as propitious as a tropical greenhouse for the luxuriant unfolding of the ego, the neurotic need for recognition, the narcissistic flattery of the image. Silvio Berlusconi, *il cavaliere*, said one day that his most precious possession had been attacked – his image. The old Jewish *Bilderverbot*¹ was not without its prospective wisdom.

A particular trigger decided me to risk this unlikely project. The twenty-first of January is the anniversary both of the execution of Louis Capet and of the clinical death of Lenin. That day, in the early 1960s, our history teacher in the *préparatoire* class of the Lycée Pierre-de-Fermat, an old monarchist aesthete, would sport a black tie as a token of mourning. We countered him in no uncertain terms with red scarfs and ties. By fortuitous coincidence, it was on 21 January 2001 that I (very belatedly) defended my *habilitation* to conduct research in philosophy. Having been long convinced of the imminence of great upheavals, I had always neglected that formality.

The requirements that this bout of academic skating imposes are laid down in ministerial circulars. The dossier must 'provide a

^{*} Raymond Molinier (Marco), 1904–94, joined the Jeunesse Communistes in 1922. He was with Trotsky in Turkey from early April 1929, and organised Trotsky's mid-1930s' stay in France. From 1935 he was an entryist member of the SFIO. At the beginning of WWII he joined up with a circus in Lisbon, which provided a channel through which he was able to save numerous revolutionary militants. He headed for Argentina after 1945. An activist in the PRT-ERP, he quit the country after the 1976 coup, returning to France in 1977. There he was active in the LCR.

[†] Jules Fourier, 1907–99, decorator. In the PCF from 1929, and elected an MP for that party in 1936. He broke with the PCF at the moment of the Nazi–Soviet pact. A Resistance militant, he was deported to a concentration camp. After the war he was active in the PSU and subsequently the LCR. He published his memoirs *Graine Rouge* in 1983.

synthesis of several dozen pages, presenting, firstly, the scientific career of the candidate, his or her methodology and the coherence of the different elements of the dossier, and secondly, the possible extent of his or her research'. In sum: my life (intellectual, quite omitting the body) and my work. This exercise flatters the retrospective illusion of a coherent trajectory based on reason.

How can one play this game without retrospectively introducing an artificial order into disordered curiosities and passions, encounters and experiments in which chance plays a part? What unity can be ascribed to an itinerary full of false trails and turnings back? What connection can be established between this series of trials and errors without bringing in accidents of biography, since – in my case – the 'elements of the academic dossier' can scarcely be distinguished from my dossier as an activist, and the 'methodology' required by the ministerial authorities was often subordinate to political bifurcations and choices that had very little to do with methodology?

The session was friendly rather than solemn, my defence being the opportunity for a complicit comparison of intellectual trajectories that mixed mutual attraction and genuine divergence, not to mention misunderstandings and miscognitions.² I experienced the feeling that we belonged to a landscape threatened with disappearance. We had all grown up in the historical sequence opened by the Great War and the Russian Revolution, on a continent that was now almost submerged. Our formative years – the 1950s, 60s and 70s – were as remote, for the new minds of the new century, as the Belle Époque, the Dreyfus affair, or the heroic deeds of Teruel and Guadalajara had been to us. Can the light from our extinct stars still travel on? Is there still time to rescue this tradition from the conformism that always threatens?

To transmit, but what? And how? It is the heirs who decide the inheritance. They make the selection, and are more faithful to it in infidelity than in the bigotry of memorial. For fidelity can itself become a banally conservative routine, preventing one from being astonished by the present. How not to distrust, anyway, that virtuous fidelity which betrayal accompanies like a shadow? Does one always know to what or whom one is really faithful?

Fidelity has a past. It is never sure of having a future. Many friends, tired no doubt of often having had to press against the grain of history, have made peace with the intolerable order of things. How melancholy was the disenchanted fidelity of Flaubert's 48ers in *A Sentimental*

Education! 'Remain faithful to what you were' means being faithful to the fissure of the event and the moment of truth, where what is usually invisible suddenly reveals itself. It does not mean giving in to the command of the winners, surrendering to their victory, entering their ranks. As opposed to a dogged attachment to a faded past, it means being 'faithful to the rendezvous' – whether one of love, politics or history.

Children see the world on their own scale. This ground-level vision for me was one of a tiled floor, cracks in the warped lino, miniature Tours de France whose racers were beer or lemonade bottle-tops. A pond for us was an ocean, a backyard a jungle, a thimble a world. We keep this childish relationship to history, making a vertiginous mountain, a crevice or a dizzying abyss out of the smallest wrinkle. In 'old Europe', exhausted, crippled and broken-down, our postwar generations saw more in the way of farces and comedies than of epics. We had only the tragi-comic echoes of tragedies experienced at a distance or vicariously. Our boulevard theatre showed the *buffone*, the *fanfarone* and the *pantalone*, rather than the heroism of the young people of the Affiche Rouge. Born amid a war that we were told about but had not fought, we had only imaginary stormings of the Winter Palace and battles of the Ebro. In the same way, Gilles Perrault had believed he was waging in Algeria the war of civilisation that he missed; he found himself in the ranks of a colonial army of occupation; and he never finished expiating this sinister misunderstanding.³ Régis Debray, off in search of history in the making, returned with the sketches for his *Journal d'un petit bourgeois entre deux feux et quatre murs*, devastated at not having written by the age of thirty a line that would have been worth a verse of Rimbaud. Despite being in a hurry, we were forced to bend, against time that is always pressing, to the hard school of patience, and learn the slowness of impatience.

From their journeys to Abyssinia, many returned bruised by disappointment and bitterness. Others were lost. Michèle Firk, unsurprised by the coming of her executioners.* Pierre Goldman, unconsolated at not having known Marcel Rayman.† Michel Recanati, frustrated by

* Michèle Firk, born 1937, member of the PCF, involved in getting support to the Algerian FLN. Committed suicide in 1968 as she was about to be arrested by the Guatemalan police during the guerrilla struggle.

† Pierre Goldman, 1944–79, born in Lyon to Polish–Jewish Resistance members. His anti-fascism led him to the UEC, in which he was a member of the *service d'ordre*. In 1966 he headed for Cuba, with the objective of joining up with a guerrilla movement in Latin

an age that failed to match his expectations.* And François Maspero, in both his life and his books, who never ceased to carry within him the shade of a brother who fell at the front in the struggle against Nazism.†

Revolutionaries with no revolution? The suicidal pursuit of an outmoded ideal? Quixotic tragedies? When Che Guevara resumed his journey, his shield on his arm and feeling beneath his heels 'the ribs of Rocinante',⁴ he was in no way suicidal, contrary to what a half-baked psychology claims. Mentioning the possibility of his coming death, he wrote in his farewell letter to his parents: 'I don't seek it, but it's within the logical realm of probabilities.' This logic was the simple corollary of an 'illogical moment in the history of humanity'.

America. Returning to Paris without firing a shot, he frequented West Indian circles in the capital. Arrested on 8 April 1970, he was accused of four robberies, in one of which a pharmacist and her assistant had been killed. Sentenced, in 1974, to life imprisonment at his first trial, he wrote his autobiography, *Souvenirs obscurs d'un Juif polonais né en France*, which Seuil published in 1975. Acquitted at his second trial of the double murder, he was soon released. But he had just three years left to live, as he was assassinated on 20 September 1979 by a mysterious group called Honneur de la Police. Ten thousand people attended his funeral at the Père-Lachaise, including most of the main personalities of the far left.

Marcel Rayman/Rajman, 1923–44, a Polish migrant worker, was head of the 11th arrondissement Jeunesse Communiste during the German Occupation. Active in the 2nd Jewish detachment of the FTP, he schooled the Czech and Armenian groups of the MOI in military technique, both in theory and practice. Also a member of the train-derailing unit. Arrested, tortured and shot together with the Manouchian/Affiche Rouge group.

* Michel Recanati (Ludo), 1950–78, a baccalaureat student in 1968, who later studied at the Paris Faculty of Letters and School of Oriental Languages. His parents were publishers/publicists. A member of the JCR from 1966. Member of the national bureau of the CAL in May 68. On the central committee then the politburo of the LC, responsible for high school students. One of the leaders of the LC's *service d'ordre* at the time of its June 1973 banning. Under warrant for arrest from July 1973, he was locked up in La Santé on 17 September. Released under caution in November 1973, awaiting a trial, he was stripped of his ID. Ultimately the case against him and Krivine was dismissed in October 1974. At the beginning of 1975 he resigned from the central committee then gradually drifted away from the LCR. Killed himself in 1978. His friend Romain Goupil dedicated a film to him, *Mourir à 30 ans* ['To die aged 30'].

Romain Goupil (Charpentier), born 1951, LC/LCR member, one of the leaders of the stewarding service ('service d'ordre'). After his departure from the LCR, moved further and further towards neoconservative positions. Supported the Iraq wars. Filmmaker and writer.

† François Maspero, born 1932, director/founder of the La Joie de Lire bookshop (1957–74) in the Latin Quarter, a meeting place for all anti-colonialist and revolutionary activists. Well-known editor, publisher and journal director of publications such as *Partisans* (1961–72). Member of the PCF in 1955–56, then a 'porteur de valises' (bag carrier for the Algerian resistance). Member of the LC from 1969 to 1973, today a translator and writer.

Our post-heroic generations were not keen to be miniature Chateaubriands or Malraux. No one chooses their historical moment. You have to be content with the challenges and opportunities that the era offers, and 'have the modesty to say that the time we live in is not *the* unique or fundamental or irruptive point in history where everything is completed and begun again.'⁵ When great hopes have lead in their wings, little ones spring up like mushrooms on the ground, in everyday resistance and minuscule conspiracies.

How can one tackle a history in which individual and collective are constantly intertwined? I? We? The first person singular misses the plurality of angles, of intersecting points of view and multiple perspectives. It falls into the trap of complacency and self-pity, prey to an illusion of the sovereign subject, in control of his or her life and reason.

As for the 'we', caught in the net of a generation, it imposes affinities that are not agreed, which the heart no longer shares. It is increasingly hard for me to recognise myself in that 'generation' of old hams who refuse to get off the stage. The derisory tag of '68-er' is ever more hateful when borne as the pennant of a certificate of imperial nobility. Hervé Hamon and Patrick Rotman's book is exemplary of this generational hijacking and confiscation: a princely success story, light years away from the rigours of the *Annales* school.⁶ The 'generation' that they compose is prodigious in fraudulent confessions and miserly in sincere self-criticism. It is spoiled to the point of becoming senile. 'We invented the Third World,' Jean-Pierre Le Dantec boasts. 'We discovered the Third World,' Bernard Kouchner makes out.⁷ There were those who used to claim to have 'discovered' America, as if it had been waiting for them, as if it had not existed without them: and as if these beautiful unknown lands could only be drawn from their historic slumber by the resurrecting kiss of the West!

The 'problem of generations' has sometimes provided a clever pretext for replacing social classes with age classes. A reassuringly biased representation of antagonisms: 'it'll pass', this 'it' meaning

* Hervé Hamon, born 1946, journalist and author, together with Patrick Rotman, of *Les Porteurs de Valises* (on French opposition to the Algerian War) in 1979, and the two volume *Génération*, namely the 1987 *Les Années de Rêve* (covering 1956–68) and *Les Années de Poudre* (post May 68) in 1988.

Patrick Rotman, born 1949, journalist and TV producer, produced important works on Algeria and on the 1968 generation together with Hervé Hamon.

revolt, insubordination, recalcitrance – since youth does indeed have to ‘pass’. A happy ending. Everything ends up returning to order and rank. A question of biology. The blasé wisdom of sober old men.

Thus everything passes, everything goes
And we ourselves pass away . . .

To give an account of a collective experience, however, it is hard to avoid the use of ‘we’. Making clear right away, of course, that this is not a ‘royal we’ (something that is at best a politeness, and at worst an abuse of power), but an instrumental one. Unstable and uncertain, it sometimes denotes a definite group (the *Ligue Communiste*), sometimes an invisible community whose links of affinity run below the deceptive surface of visible communities; or again a tacit conspiracy, without formal membership, limits or borders, of the irredeemably stiff-necked.

‘We’, said Lucien Goldmann, is not the plural of ‘I’, but something different. The solution would be to write ‘in the fourth person’, as Gilles Deleuze proposed, citing Ferlinghetti: ‘The voice of the fourth person singular, in which no one speaks and yet which does exist.’ This imaginative usage of ‘one’ would escape the dubious majesty of ‘we’ as well as the suspect pride of ‘I’,⁸ at grips with its superegos.

One lives, one loves, one dies . . .
One isn’t serious at seventeen . . .
— Rimbaud

The depth of this ‘one’, to cite Deleuze once more, is ‘that of the event itself, or of the fourth person’. Because to attain one’s own singularity, you have to know how to efface the share of subjectivity in the event. ‘One’ then goes beyond the subjective story, the anecdotal character of ‘too close’. It becomes ‘the mark of transition, of entry into movement’, of the uprooting of being in the flux of becoming.

I shall seek, accordingly, to hold myself to an interstitial speech, an unstable equilibrium between an ‘I’, a ‘we’, and this ungraspable ‘one’. In this uncomfortable interval where the ‘fourth person singular’ dwells, the ‘I’ cannot be totally eclipsed. The important thing, though, as Heine said, is ‘always to clearly indicate one’s colour’, instead of pretending to the objectivity and impartiality of

self-evidence. I shall proclaim this, accordingly, once and for all. The colour is red, since 'the very air is red, as if screaming'.⁹ And 'partisan writing' is not an act of sectarianism, but a token of basic honesty towards the reader.

Over the years, the conspiracy of egos has totally got the upper hand over the conspiracy of equals – what Guy Hocquenghem called 'renegacy'.^{*} I don't much care for the rhetoric of betrayal. Basically, turn-coats are faithful to themselves, and parvenus to what they've become.

The dividing line passes rather between the 'one-timers' and the 'exes': a demarcation of cynicism and resentment. 'One-timers' keep a certain emotional loyalty. The word conjures up without regret common experiences, a kind of informal club. 'One-timers' regret nothing. They have neither reneged nor repented. When the heart is no longer there, they continue differently, in other ways, in other forms.

The 'exes', on the contrary, make a clear break. They play a role that they no longer believe in. They even 'deny their denial', and 'to the disgrace of apostasy add the cowardice of lying'.¹⁰ This is a recurring phenomenon in history: 'former apostles who dreamed of a golden age for all humanity have been happy to propagate the age of money; several of them have become millionaires, and more than one has reached a most honorific and lucrative position – travel by railway is quick'.¹¹ And, as for the supersonic plane . . .

Sometimes, 'one-timers' become 'exes', joining this world of dead souls, a world of phantoms and spectres who live only in the past. Happily, even if the Famas (almost) always end up winning, the Cronopios do not all end up as Famas.[†] The latter have the taste for victory. But if only they made history, then 'there wouldn't be any more History'.¹² We would fall back into the claws of Destiny or Providence of sinister memory, which it took so much effort to escape.

The danger in dwelling too much on one's past is that of falling back into it, in the quest for excuses and justifications. The 'approximative' journalists insultingly attributed to me the maxim that we were supposedly 'right to be wrong'.¹³ Their intention, no doubt, was to present me as a doctrinaire armed with certitudes, inaccessible to doubt, stubbornly opposing his fantasies to reality. I don't remember

* Guy Hocquenghem, 1946–1988, died of AIDS aged 42. A member of the JCR during his studies at the Rue d'Ulm École Normale Supérieure. Upon the creation of the Ligue Communiste in 1969, he was expelled for 'spontaneism'. In 1971 he was one of the founders of the FHAR (Homosexual Front for Revolutionary Action).

† A reference to Julio Cortázar's *Historias de cronopios y de famas*.

ever having expressed myself in this way. On reflection, however, it seems neither shocking nor unlikely.

It is indeed possible to be 'right to be wrong'. This happens even rather often. It is a matter of context and circumstances. Wrong against whom, in relation to whom, about what? In politics as in history, there is no 'run of the arrow'. Today's temporary success or capricious victory proves nothing. The last word is never spoken. Despite immediate appearances, Luther was wrong and Thomas Münzer right. Genuine modesty, according to André Suarès, consists in 'knowing not always to see oneself as right, and in being deliberately wrong'.¹⁴ The wrong is often the right of the defeated.

The pragmatic criterion of 'what works' for the moment may be good for Tony Blair (or Deng Xiao-ping).¹⁵ But efficacy is always relative to the time factor. Régis Debray, claiming practical realism against the impotence of principles, told me one day that he had served Mitterrand for the sake of efficacy. Ten years later, this supposed efficacy was no longer so obvious. Effective in what way, and for whom? I imagine that Sami Naïr likewise justified his service to Jean-Pierre Chevènement from a concern for efficacy.* In the same way as Luc Ferry or Blandine Kriegel no doubt invoke their desire to be useful to give a noble gloss to their pathetic rallying to Jean-Pierre Raffarin and Nicolas Sarkozy.† This servitude is all the more despica-

* Sami Naïr, born 1947, a member of the JCR then the LC in the early 1970s. A speaker of four languages (French, English, Spanish, Arabic), he has taught at Paris VIII and Valencia. Having grown close to Jean-Pierre Chevènement, he was for some years a member of the latter's MDC party. Member of the Conseil d'Etat, professor at the Sciences-Po.

Jean-Pierre Chevènement, born 1939, studied at the Ecole Nationale de l'Administration, and occupied several ministerial positions in the 1980s and 1990s. A presidential candidate in 2002, he scored less than 5 per cent. Mayor and then senator representing Belfort. A member of the SFIO from 1964, he took part in the foundation of the Parti Socialiste at its 1971 Epinay Congress. Leader of the CERES tendency and then Socialisme et République. Author of the party's 1981 programme. An opponent of the First Gulf War, the Maastricht Treaty and the European Constitution. He created the MDC then the MRC, a Eurosceptic and national-republican party of the centre-left.

† Luc Ferry, born 1951, right-wing liberal philosopher. Minister of education under the UMP prime minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin 2002–04, he proposed the bill banning the open display of religious symbols and clothing in schools. Author, with Alain Renaut, of the anti-radical book *La pensée 68 en France*.

Blandine Kriegel, born 1943, from 1967 a member of the Maoist UJCML. Student of Michel Foucault at the College de France. Broke with Marxism in 1979, becoming a supporter and adviser of Jacques Chirac from the 1990s. Political philosopher, president for the state council for integration from 2002–08, and opponent of positive discrimination.

ble from being voluntary and agreed. Are they so convinced of being useful, and to what end?

The question is one of scale and perspective. Joan of Arc, Saint-Just, Blanqui and many others were condemned by the tribunal of God or History. Their judges deemed them wrong. But in profane history there is no last judgement. The verdict is always open to appeal. Seeing how the world is going, we were indeed right to be wrong against Stalin and his show trials, against the terrifying Congresses of Victors, against the beatitudes of neoliberal globalisation celebrated by Alain Minc.* And right to believe, against the grain, that the world can still change and that we can contribute to this.

We have sometimes deceived ourselves, perhaps even often, and on many things. But at least we did not deceive ourselves about either the struggle or the choice of enemy.

Thirty years after independence, Algeria was in the grips of civil war. The war of liberation in Indochina took a bad turn, with the butchery in Cambodia and the conflicts between peoples who had proclaimed themselves brothers. The humanist socialism that Che dreamed of seems to have evaporated. And yet? Is this sufficient reason to go over to the winning side, arms and baggage, and enrol in the imperial crusades of George Bush and Donald Rumsfeld?

The 'dispersal of meaning' in no way justifies such rejections and rallying. Even before the fall of the Berlin Wall and the implosion of the Soviet Union, Jean-Christophe Bailly wrote about the 1960s:

Revolution changed its home base, its continent, according to political colour, but it came from outside, and had the irrational virtue of an emotion tied to something distant that had to be brought into being. An emotional movement, no doubt, even if it was armed with theories, and lent more to the actual combatants than they could return. Today the tone is one of mockery, even pride. People conceal the fact that they waved flags and shouted names, or else they laugh themselves sick. There was undoubtedly an immense amount of illusion – but if there had not been, there would not have been that movement, that leap, the active

* Alain Minc, born 1945, businessman, editorialist and politico-economic consultant. A graduate of the ENA and Paris Sciences Po. Has been on the board of various major businesses such as high street retailer FNAC, Yves Saint Laurent and *Le Monde*. Adviser to Nicolas Sarkozy. Became the symbol of the French version of globalisation boosterism with his book *La Mondialisation heureuse* (1997).

convergence of all those rejections, and would we not then have covered ourselves with shame, quite incomparable with the mistakes that we may have committed in the running fire of support actions?¹⁶

This is my position too. The planet-wide demonstrations of 15 February 2003 against the imperialist war were a new struggle against the shame there would have been in doing nothing. Without seeking here any positive hero, which is certainly for the best: neither Bin Laden nor Saddam Hussein were champions of a new internationalism.

Duty performed, or useless service? As long as one claims the right to start again, the last word is never said. And one always recommences from the middle, as Gilles Deleuze maintained. Neither a clean slate nor a white page: 'It is the future of the past, as it were, that is in question.'¹⁷

This book is not a novel. But it is a story of apprenticeship – an apprenticeship in patience and slowness – however incomplete. It has no other ambition than to retrace an activist and intellectual trajectory, after the disaster of Stalinism, in the age of the commodity apotheosis, when the hieroglyphs of modernity reveal their secrets to the light of day. It is neither an autobiography nor a memoir. Like the tender and stubborn memoirs of Cadichon,* the only worthwhile memoirs are indeed those of an ass. It is rather a simple testimony, designed to help in understanding what we did and what we desired.

Travel diaries or notebooks, whose digressions, refrains, fragments, quotations, controversies and remembrances make up a political *Carte du Tendre*, or an imaginary landscape like those drawn for children, where a benevolent ogre is hidden in the foliage.¹⁸

* The performing donkey of *Cadichon's Life Story*, adapted from the Comtesse de Ségur's *Les Mémoires d'un âne*.

The Party of Flowers and Nightingales

The mind is not spontaneously disposed to take into account the order of time, and revolution is a long and slow movement of impatience, itself patient. [. . .] We live a time of revolutionary slowness. A time of inevitable revolutionary slowness.

— Dionys Mascolo

Faith in the sovereignty of reason is a sin of intellectual pride. People claim to choose their own trajectory in full consciousness and freedom. They speak of commitment. The false modesty of the reflexive formula – ‘committing oneself’ – is poor cover for the self-sufficiency of subjects who would see themselves master of themselves and their actions. As if those who ‘commit themselves’ were condescending to make a gift of their person. As if this gift honoured the cause that they deigned to espouse.

So much has been said about ‘committed intellectuals’. If a distinction can still be made between those ‘working on things’ and those ‘working on thought’, then the term may be acceptable.¹ On condition, of course, that the asymmetry of their relationship is not forgotten. In the social division of labour, theoretical knowledge and the manipulation of language play an important role, but there is no human activity that does not involve the intervention of thought. The non-intellectual does not exist.

This is perhaps why Blanchot saw ‘intellectual’ as a ‘derisory name’, or a ‘name of ill repute’. Does it denote a status, a functional or hierarchical distinction, an order or an excellence? At all events, it is not a trade. A mastery of judgement, perhaps? That ‘part of ourselves that turns us towards what is done in the world in order to appreciate and judge it’² There would then be something of the judge in the intellectual, a repressed desire to play God, or priest, or clown. A propensity to emerge from the ranks and hoist oneself up to a vantage point.

The intellectual is not a specialist in intelligence. Ever since the name was coined, Blanchot continues, 'intellectuals have done nothing but stop for a moment being what they were'. An intermittent function, then. Devoted to a double intermittency, of both thought and action. They are never content to be 'one among others', but make the exorbitant claim to be heard as 'representatives of the universal' and the 'conscience of all'. Hence the recurrent temptation to use the influence acquired in a particular field to extend their authority.

An intellectuel engagé? The order of words is significant. Intellectual first, as if commitment followed from this by logical necessity, by necessary deduction, or by the simple path of reason. As if action, finally, were simply the application of intellect. The concept thus preserves the order of precedence and privilege. The word commands the flesh. Relegating passion and emotions to second place, the mind remains first.

All things considered, 'committed intellectually' better expresses the fragility of reasons and the paradox of decision, given that 'if I know, I don't decide.'³ Why insist on placing this portion of risk or wager under the authority of a social position? No one would talk of a 'committed worker', a 'committed peasant', or a committed nurse or teacher. By committing themselves, intellectuals seem to accept a derogation, a lowering of themselves from the rules of their trade, with its duty of reserve and the sacrosanct 'ethical neutrality'. By entering into the *mêlée*, they are suspected of a borderline bastardy, straddling theory and practice, truth and opinion. If today they betray the bourgeoisie for the sake of man, why should they not conversely betray humanity tomorrow for the sake of the co-options, distinctions, promotions and flattering recognition of their peers?

Today the high profile of the sentinels of universality is in the process of disappearing, becoming lost in the bric-a-brac of think tanks. It dissolves in the massification of knowledges, in the social fragmentation of work, and in the declassing of its priests by the media. It is quite futile, then, to wonder whether, in an age of the 'general intellect', the notion of intellectual still has any meaning, whether the figure of Sartrean commitment is still meaningful, whether the generalised master-thinker is en route to extinction in favour of Foucault's specific intellectual and the scientific expert.

And yet no title has been so noisily claimed as this one – displayed, exhibited on the op-ed pages of papers and on countless petitions at

the very moment when it is being devalued. Those who sprung up (filmmakers, writers, lawyers, doctors, journalists, academics . . .) to support the *sans-papiers* against the Pasqua laws were greeted in the press as something new.* They were in fact the sign of a double movement: the democratisation of intellectual functions, on the one hand, and a corporative caste assertion on the other, characteristic of the re-feudalising of social relations.

Where does this uncertain legitimization of intellectual power come from? From talent or celebrity? The relationship between the two is problematic. There are talented people without celebrity, and celebrities who are famously untalented. In the age of the great media spectacle, it is enough to believe that the two always go together, or to act as if the certainty of being in the right, in the heaven of ideas, gave permission to 'dismiss reason in the world, but also the world of reason'.⁴ What Charles Péguy called 'the intellectual party' always tends to appoint itself as 'messenger of the absolute', as a 'substitute for the priest', a superior confraternity 'marked by the sacred'.

This can be seen simply by examining the gallery of our priest-intellectuals. It is not hard to imagine the majority of their number sitting on the tribunal of an inquisition, some in the role of paunchy and pitiless bishop, others sweating resentment as emaciated mandatories of divine providence. They do not take sides in the matter. They rather appoint themselves as swords in a holy cause.

Each will recognise his own.

Why then an 'intellectual' at all? Why not simply a militant, without the privilege of any expertise, on a strict footing of civic equality? If politics is neither a profession nor a particular skill (as against that of the architect, carpenter or shoemaker), if it is true that in a democracy political skill is the algebraic sum of individual lack of skill, then the sociologist, the physicist, the biologist, the philosopher, when they take a position, count no more than anyone else. Their professional capacity does not endow them with any hierarchical authority in public life.

* Pasqua laws: 1993 immigration 'reforms' introduced by Interior Minister Charles Pasqua, building on earlier measures from 1986. These laws placed conditions on the automatic citizenship previously given to immigrants' children born in France; made it harder to get stable residency and naturalisation in France; and gave the state more powers to deport *sans-papiers*. The application of the laws led to a wave of protest, notably by celebrities from the cultural sphere.

Militancy? A word that doesn't have a good press in an age of individualism without individuality. It has the sepia colour of outmoded heroism. There is too much of a whiff of the barracks and the squaddie about it. And *engagé* does not sound much better. It suggests signing up in the army, the Foreign Legion, in holy orders . . . At least militancy has something collective about it, not just a solitary pleasure but a principle of solidarity and shared responsibility. I have heard the political militant described as 'an intellectual who doesn't think'.⁵ But what if, on the contrary, intellectuals who don't act are irresponsible ideologists, with no account to render to anybody, who can turn round any day and attack their former enthusiasms?

Militancy, for Dionys Mascolo, is 'a thought of action', a demanding morality of politics: 'All political activity is moral, engaging the world of moral values, and consequently involves moral judgement.' This demand is diametrically opposed to those political moralisms whose admonitions swell in parallel with the demoralisation of their politics and their turn to resigned cynicism.

Militant responsibility is light years away from dilettante irresponsibility. Not only that of the eternal sniper, who believes himself free on the pretext of waging a lone battle, but also that of the perpetual 'fellow traveller', who claims to keep a distance and preserve an illusory personal space, while their concern is simply to keep open the possibility of playing a double game, with each hand on a different board. The 'non-party Stalinist' was once the exemplary prototype of this sympathiser, convinced of their independence yet servilely pervaded with prejudices. These were one of the 'worst by-products of Stalinism', able to 'play their role with the most guilty innocence'.⁶

That 'shadowy case of the sympathiser' came in several different variants. Sartre was a fellow traveller of both Stalinism and Maoism. Aragon was the Party's official poet. Each of them, however, the member as well as the non-member, remained 'sympathisers', whether within or without. Sartre, moving from a principled anti-Communism to cohabitation with the Stalinist or Maoist state, 'confused the revolutionary project with Stalinism'. As for Aragon, his zeal in espousing bureaucratic sinuousities did not prevent him from remaining a sympathiser within.

What then is a committed intellectual committed to? There is no commitment in the abstract, undetermined, without an adjective;

there are only specific commitments. It is not a question of devoting oneself to this or that fetish, taking up a sublime cause, but rather of being unreconciled to the world as it is. If the world is not acceptable, you must undertake to change it. With no certainty of success, it goes without saying; there is no escaping that logic. When you believe you are solemnly crossing the threshold of commitment, quite freely, you are in fact already under way, headfirst.

Our commencements are always recommencements. From the middle, of course.

Bad faith claims that the world is doing fine, and above all that nothing need be changed. Resignation murmurs that there is cause for concern, but that nothing can be done, the market being natural and inequality eternal. The senile cynic, finally, admits that not all is for the best in this best of worlds, but goes on to add right away that humanity is too mediocre to deserve putting yourself out to alter the course of things.

Yet eternity does not exist, so it is necessary to wager on the 'non-inevitable share of becoming' inscribed 'in this general faculty of surpassing that takes varying forms in dream, imagination and desire, each one of them aiming to go beyond the limits'.⁷ The notion of commitment clumsily evokes this logical wager on the uncertain. A secular, everyday wager, launched anew each day.

This wager, unavoidable as long as the necessary and the possible remain in disagreement, is made by countless people across the world, however discreetly. The Polish dissident Karol Modzelewski, when asked one day for the secret of his perseverance, despite disappointments and disillusion, simply replied: 'loyalty to persons unknown'. There are always, beyond gregarious membership and exclusive identity, these elective affinities, these molecular loyalties, this hidden community of sharing; this minuscule conspiracy and discreet conjuration whose 'secret name', for Heine, was communism, transmitted from one person to another. Despite the infamies committed in its name, it remains the most pertinent word, the word most freighted with memory, the most precise and most apt to name the historic issues of the present time.

On 11 July 1977, at seven in the evening, Roberto MacLean was murdered in Barranquilla, on the doorstep of his house. An almost everyday occurrence: in Colombia, thousands of political executions

take place each year.* MacLean was black and a revolutionary. He was thirty-nine years old, and had been a political militant since the age of fourteen. He led the civic movement in his town. For more than ten years, he lived each day with the imminence of violent death.

A digression? In fact, nothing could be more pertinent. MacLean is a kind of emblematic representative of those unknowns to whom we are tied by an irredeemable debt.

I have no religious sense of redemptive suffering. I have never conceived my commitments as asceticism or reparation. I have never taken vows of intellectual poverty or chastity. As a young Communist, I took an immediate dislike to the bureaucratic bigotry of the Stalinist priests and its Maoist counterpart. The young red guards in their French version, hymning the thoughts of the Great Helmsman, were odious to me – these little monks who gave their person to the Cause (of the people or the proletariat). The Cause? It never occurred to me to sacrifice to such ventriloquous idols. Political militancy for me is the opposite of a sad passion. A joyous experience despite its bad moments. My party, like that of Heine, is ‘the party of flowers and nightingales’.

During the gloomy 1980s, we stuck to our course under the satisfied condescension of the various ‘exes’, who had given up on everything but themselves. In a tone of ironic compassion, behind which sarcasm visibly lurked, they would ask: ‘Still a militant then, old chap . . .?’ As if we were a disappearing species, the last Mohicans of a condemned tribe. As if we had lost our time and wasted our talents, instead of climbing the ladder of a successful career garlanded with laurels.

In the next decade, there was a change of air, even if it didn’t exactly turn scarlet. The tone had changed. The arrogance of the ‘winners’ was seized with doubt and far more muted. They could see that we had avoided, in a bad time of restoration and counter-reform, a grotesque shipwreck on ‘the terrible sea of action without purpose’.⁸

Our generation was fortunate, to be sure, in escaping the morbid

* Roberto MacLean was born in Colombia in 1938. He was a college professor and a member of the Colombian Socialist Bloc’s (Bloque Socialista de Colombia – El Bloque) Trotskyist faction, which itself was part of the Morenoist faction in the reunified Fourth International, and would later, in 1977, leave El Bloque to found the PST. He was also active in the civil movements that existed at the time across Colombia, which would later be revealed to have been largely influenced and led by the M-19 guerrilla movement. His assassination prompted the exile of all his comrades in Barranquilla, most of which left the country, some going to Bogota – where they helped found the PST.

games of duplicity, false passports⁹ and lies that contort the soul. We did not have to philosophise in secret while publicly proclaiming the death of philosophy, nor hide books put on the index by the Party high priests, nor live clandestinely forbidden loves. We did not have to undergo the wearing complex of betrayal that haunts Nizan's novels, from *La Conspiration* to *Antoine Bloyé*.

No, we hadn't wasted our time. We rubbed shoulders with many indispensable unknowns – hundreds and thousands of MacLeans. We experienced wonderful friendships, and resurrecting shocks propitious for the rejuvenation of hearts and souls. Of course, we had more evenings of defeat than triumphant mornings. But we put behind us that Last Judgement of sinister memory. And, by dint of patience, we won the precious right to begin again:

We are effectively reduced for the time being to developing an acknowledgement of defeat, and at one and the same time, to deepening a rejection of such kind that it does not have to justify itself, even at the start: that goes without saying. It is later that positive proposals will come, if possible. It is unnecessary, despite malign injunctions, to be able to say what we want, in order to know what we will never want at any price. That is quite simple. So simple, even, that it is possible, for the first time in a long while, to feel tranquil in this situation. There are none of these risks of error here that have held us back for so long.¹⁰

We were young people in a hurry, as is inevitably the case. History was breathing down our necks. As if we had to make up for the wasted time of the 'century of extremes', as if we were afraid of missing our appointments, in politics and in love.

In the Book of Job, the word *sabreen* refers to 'those who have patience'. We too have had to learn this biblical patience, this old Jewish patience going back more than five thousand years, and transformed today into the patience and endurance of the Palestinians. We have had to learn the necessary revolutionary slowness, the courage of the everyday and the will of each day, which are again a restrained and dominated impatience. We have had to submit ourselves to 'the patient toil that gives form to the impatience of freedom'.¹¹

Like all heresies (for 'heresy is also a form of impatience'), communism is an 'anger at the present',¹² an impatience that goes back to

Amos and the prophets, zealous to hasten the end of time or the uncertain coming of the Messiah.

And yet nothing did come. And we had to learn 'the art of waiting'. An active waiting, an urgent patience, an endurance and a perseverance that are the opposite of passive waiting for a miracle. For 'the miracle is not of this world, but the hardest planks can be pierced'.¹³

The Force of Habit

Besides, you shouldn't flaunt your personal life.

– Erri de Luca*

'Rosebud . . .'? A moment comes, François Maspero said, when you want to talk about your youth. That's not a very good sign, rather an indication that the tide has turned, that you have your life behind you instead of ahead, that a cloying self-pity has gained ground. Some people, like Proust, manage to exploit this retro desire quite brilliantly. Others, such as Vallès or Gorky, channel it into a social passion. François Maspero, for his part, manipulated it with the melancholy delicacy that was characteristic of him.[†] Philippe Caubère[‡] succeeded in turning a devouring narcissism into fireworks of bitter humour.

I have neither their ambitions nor their talents. And yet, despite the wise advice of Erri de Luca, I have to describe these years of apprenticeship if only to puncture the illusion that a certain path was chosen quite freely, when it was in part already traced for me.

Communism was something I fell into – unless it was communism that fell on me. On my mother's side, red was the prevailing colour. According to the records of the Seine departmental prefecture, my great-grandfather Jules Léon Starck, a plumber by trade and the son of Régina Starck, an unmarried seamstress, married a scion of the

* A major Italian writer, and more recently filmmaker, Erri de Luca was a leading militant in Lotta Continua. One of his few works to have appeared in English is *God's Mountain* (New York: Riverhead, 1982).

† The reference is to François Maspero's autobiographical novel *Cat's Grin* (New York: Knopf, 1986).

‡ Philippe Caubère, born in Marseille in 1950. Actor at Ariane Mnouchkine's Théâtre du Soleil and the Cartoucherie de Vincennes from 1971. He played the title role in Mnouchkine's film *Molière*. Very strongly marked by May 68, which he witnessed in Aix-en-Provence. Director of the films *My Father's Glory* and *My Mother's Castle*, based on Marcel Pagnol's semi-autobiographical books.

nobility, Adèle Aimée Adolphe Bernard de Tracy! My grandfather Eugène Louis Hippolyte Jules, born in Paris on 22 September 1857 at 4 bis, passage de la Main-d'Or, was a 'turner of wood'. My mother claimed that the name Starck came from Luxembourg, though I suspect it was simply German. But after the war of 1870–1 and the siege of Paris, Luxembourg must have seemed more respectable than victorious Germany. I like to imagine, however, that these Starcks, with their uncertain origin, were descended from the many immigrant tailors and carpenters from the Rhineland who gathered in the rebel faubourg of Saint-Antoine. And my pleasant fantasy is that they joined those early subversive circles that Marx and Engels frequented in 1844, during their first stay in Paris.

Under the Commune, Hippolyte was a fourteen-year-old 'Paris urchin' (his words). In those days, at that age you were almost adult. During the siege of Paris, he ate rats. After Bloody Week, his family was proscribed and had to move to Blois. He returned to Paris and started dealing in second-hand goods, a kind of collector à la Walter Benjamin. He preserved from his Communard tribulations a portrait of Jean-Baptiste Clément,* which hung solemnly in the dining-room. Each year, on the first Sunday of May, the family would stand up round the table and sing 'Le Temps des cerises', bringing a lump to everyone's throat.

Hippolyte was ill-favoured and often bad-tempered, far from tender towards those around him. My mother excused him on account of the attenuating circumstances of a wretched childhood. Like Proust's Françoise, he was capable of pity at the lot of the most distant people, while treating his nearest and dearest with a severity bordering on cruelty. His eyes would fill with tears at the name of a certain 'Carle Marx', though I doubt he had ever read a line of Marx's writing. This confusion of sentiments is often characteristic of popular sensibility. My mother could also lament over a crushed cat and weep when reading me a few pages of *Alone in the World*† or *Les Misérables*, but she was not the kind of person to coddle herself.

* Jean-Baptiste Clément, 1836–1903, a National Guard member who served in the public services and food commissions of the Paris Commune's council, before taking on responsibilities for munitions production and then teaching. Writer of songs including *Le Temps des cerises* (1866), which became the Commune's unofficial anthem, and *La Semaine sanglante* (1871). Upon his return from post-Commune exile, he founded the Fédération Socialiste des Ardennes.

† *Sans famille* in the original, a book by A. J. de Bruyn. It is the story of an orphan, frequently adapted for the screen, including a French series of the 1980s starring Petula Clark.

My grandmother Mathilde, some twenty years younger than Hippolyte, worked as an embroiderer on the restoration of tapestries at the château de Blois. She wore out her sight and ended up practically blind, though she lived to be almost a hundred. She also lost an arm as a result of a prick from an infected needle at work.

My mother was the youngest of three children; Hippolyte also had three more from his first marriage. Uncle Alfred fell victim to mustard gas and returned from the trenches with his lungs in shreds. At the time of the Tours congress (when the Communists and Socialists parted ways) he declared himself a Communist, 'so as not to have to see that kind of thing ever again'. My mother, with her school-leaving certificate at the age of fourteen, was placed in a workshop as an apprentice milliner. She delivered hats for special occasions in the fashionable districts. By the age of twenty-one, and a 'leading worker', she left to travel the world and live off her trade. This was in 1931. Her first stop was Oran, where her employers from Blois had found her a job. That was where she met my father; the great world adventure ended here. But at least she had tried to escape.

In the small colonial world of the metropolitan French (civil servants, soldiers of the garrison, shopkeepers), to marry a Jew, and a divorcee into the bargain, was looked at askance. People tried to dissuade her, prophesying venereal disease and abnormal children. But she was not the kind of person to be intimidated. She became a philo-Semite, to the point of wearing a Star of David and inventing unlikely origins for herself in an imaginary Eastern Europe.

Her older sister, my aunt Hélène, had a grocery and café in Blois, at the corner of the rue du Puits-Châtel and the place Ave-Maria. The customers bought on credit and settled up on payday at the end of the month. The population of these squalid streets, below the hill of the Saint-Louis cathedral, still resembled that of Zola's *The Grog Shop*. The café catered to poverty-stricken workers who played cards there and drank cheap wine. The women worked at the Poulain factory, and when they left work they were bodily searched in case they had pinched a bar of chocolate. After the lunch hour, my aunt closed her shop and bolted the door. This was her time to herself, which she devoted to crosswords or reading a few pages of Proust.

My cousins Jean and Philippe grew up as workers, becoming respectively an electrician and a car-body repairer. Both of them Communists, it goes without saying. One summer, I spent a week at my aunt's. Jean stuffed my head with CGT training courses on

exploitation, but I profited as well from their little library of basic classics: Hugo, Dumas, Zola, Vallès, Aragon, and a few Simenon novels. Also the hardback Moscow editions that smelt strongly of fish-glue: Alexei Tolstoy's *The Road to Calvary*, and *How the Steel Was Tempered* by Nicholas Ostrovsky.

Your sensibility is formed by what you read in your youth. My mother was emotionally exuberant: Hugo, Eugène Sue and Balzac were the pillars of her private pantheon. She spoke of Cosette or the Chourineur with a tremor in her voice, extracting from these republican gospels a popular morality of honesty and labour. My father, on the other hand, was a man of discreet emotion. Following a rigorous social code, he allowed himself emotional release only in the dark of the movie theatre. *Gone With the Wind*, or the Fernandel film *Meurtres*, moved him to tears. In his mind, these hidden effusions remained compatible with the rules of an unflinching masculinity.

Everyday life was enlivened by little rituals. If a heel of bread fell into the gutter, it had to be picked up, kissed, and left respectfully on a windowsill. If a crust was placed upside down on the table, it was the executioner's bread and had to be carefully placed right way up. When my mother made couscous or chestnut cake, she put aside 'something for the poor', who rarely came to claim it. After I'd had my eye on it for a whole day, this reserved piece most often ended up on my plate. But it sometimes happened that the poor did show up, in the form of an old Arab carpet-seller, jovial and toothless, who always found a place at our table.

On my father's side, the weight of ideological inheritance was lighter. The poor Jews of Mascara didn't quarrel over Talmudic quotations or abstract concepts. The occupation of my grandfather Élie was never very clear to me: at different times supposedly a wine-taster (though Mascara wine was pretty poor quality) and a volunteer fireman, and with the reputation of being a skirt-chaser to the end of his days. When funds were tight, grandmother Zora boiled water to make the neighbours think she was preparing a feast. They had six children – five boys and a girl, my aunt Julie.

My father was the fourth of these boys, and left school at the age of seven for reasons unexplained. As an adolescent, he worked as a café waiter and began a promising pugilistic career. Boxing offered North African Jews a possibility of social advance. Alphonse Halimi, Robert Cohen and many others followed that path. In his time, my father was the North African amateur welterweight champion, and could have made a

good career. He probably fought at the Central Boxing Club described by Camus in *Summer*: 'This rectangular box crammed in a thousand or so men along with two or three women – the kind who make sure they attract attention. Everyone sweated profusely. Before the battle commenced, immense loudspeakers churned out Tino Rossi songs.' These pitiless combats involved Arabs and Jews, sailors and dockers, men of Algiers who were alleged to be fakers and men of Oran with a wild reputation.

The rigours of training were hard to combine with night work as a waiter. Goodbye to the gloves and the mirage of a professional career. By way of consolation, when I was a baby my father took me from my cot in the dead of night and glued my ear to the radio, from which a nasal commentary followed the legendary match between Marcel Cerdan, the lover of Édith Piaf, and the American Tony Zale. He must have hoped to arouse a vocation in me. The 'Moroccan bombardier' was indeed my first sporting idol. Later on, after my mother had taught me to decipher syllables by the '*En riant*' method ('*Ri-ri ti-re la va-che*'), I practised my reading on the sports paper *L'Équipe*. But my career in the noble art was limited to a few initiatory lessons, and sessions of skipping and shadowboxing in front of the wardrobe mirror, as my mother decreed that my hands were too fragile (an intellectual's hands!) for this kind of exercise. She hadn't given birth to a son for him to go and get his nose broken by some brutes . . .

I was a child of the bistro as well as of my family. My father had been taken prisoner during the phoney war, but managed to escape. Using a false name, he bought a small café on the outskirts of Toulouse, along the Narbonne road. It took me a long while to understand the bureaucratic miracle that had enabled him, after being captured by the Gestapo on 29 December 1943, to escape the fate of his brothers Jules and René who were deported to the death camps. Thanks to my mother's pugnacity and perseverance, he remained in limbo at Drancy until the Liberation. She produced a certificate of her 'non-belonging to the Jewish race', thanks to the generosity of Monseigneur Salièges,* and retrieved copies of the parish registers for the faubourg Saint-Antoine. Finally, Maurice Rajfus's book on Drancy enlightened me.† Even the totalitarian terror had its rules and procedures, to which I owe my existence, and my sister her survival. When the Gestapo came to arrest

* Jules Salièges, the archbishop of Toulouse, courageously denounced the deportation of Jews.

† *Drancy, un camp de concentration très ordinaire, 1941–1944* (Paris: Le Cherche Midi, 2005).

my father, they noted her sex. As a boy she would have been deported, whereas as a girl they ignored her.

The bistro counter was my first school and my first sociological laboratory. A counter is a kind of secular confessional, the poor man's couch, where people come to confide their bruised lives. In the 1950s, our little bar had neither television nor pinball. Simply an old billiard table at which I spent whole afternoons practising, and baize cloths advertising Dubo-Dubon-Dubonnet, Byrrh and Cinzano which saw ferocious games of *belote*, *rami* or poker. My father was a virtuoso card player, and took evident pleasure from shuffling, dealing and minutely arranging his lucky (or unlucky) hand.

On the edge of the city, in a district that petered out at the foot of the hills, what was called semi-country, the Bar des Amis hosted a working-class clientele, with a mixture of Spanish refugees, Portuguese builders, Italian anti-fascists, workers from the chemical plant Onia (the future AZF)* and the ordnance factory, postmen and railwaymen, car mechanics and small shopkeepers. From the moment it opened in the morning, postmen washed down their breakfast sandwich with white wine, or coffee with a shot of brandy. In the evenings, at the aperitif hour, workers would arrive on their Solex bikes, take off their waterproofs and put their gloves on the radiator to dry. The most popular drink was homemade *pastis*, manufactured illegally, with the packets of anis hidden in the chimney and the alcohol provided by a compliant pharmacist. As this brew cost only half the price of Ricard or 51, everyone could afford to buy a round. This was a kind of popular potlatch – good for trade, though not for health.

Over rounds of drinks, the customers would spill out their troubles at work or at home. I learned a lot from these confidences over the counter. I listened all ears to the epic tales of the Spanish civil war or the exploits – still close – of Achille Viadieu† and Marcel Langer‡. Pierrot, a regular of ours, often remained silent and dreamy-eyed, his mind on a past that remained, in the everyday greyness of his work as a shop assistant, the most intense moment of his life. Rumour ascribed to him the execution of a local collaborator (perhaps the man whose

* The site of the explosion of 21 September 2001, which killed thirty people.

† Achille Viadieu, known as 'Ginou', was a leading *résistant* in Toulouse who successfully infiltrated the collaborationist networks (even becoming a regional leader), before being shot during an operation on 2 August 1944.

‡ Marcel Langer, of Polish origin, was a leading member of the Communist resistance in Toulouse, arrested in 1943 and guillotined on 23 July.

denunciation sent my father to Drancy . . .). Survivors of the Spanish war, ex-International Brigaders or MOI,* would conjure up, over the last glass before the road, those dark times in which, despite everything, they felt they were on first-name terms with History.

The bistro was solidly red. On Sundays, after the Toulouse team's football match, we were always crowded. Tony Garcia, a Spanish accordionist, would get out his instrument, and the assembled company strike up such popular choruses as 'La Môme caoutchouc' ('And what you couldn't do with her . . .'), 'Prosper yop-la-boum' ('He's the king of the tarmac . . .'), 'Je suis le maître à bord' ('I'm the only one in charge . . .') and the unforgettable 'Manon':

And suddenly all fell silent when Manon appeared,
Manon in all her beauty and ineffable youth . . .

I eagerly awaited these appearances of Manon, imagining her 'amid songs, laughter and girls' in a Montmartre where champagne gaily bubbled. These stories of disaster, of bad boys and unhappy love affairs, enraptured me. If things went well, my father would come out of his shell and hum an old Arab or Andalusian song. He'd stand on a table and lead my mother in a waltz – the wrong way round! Sunday was the day for *kémia*: boiled winkles and little crabs, highly spiced to keep people thirsty. On Monday mornings the floor would be scattered with shells and lupin pods, looking like the aftermath of a battle or the Kelipot of the Kabbalah.

The local Communist cell held its annual meetings for the distribution of membership cards in our bistro. The Union des Femmes Françaises† organised teas in solidarity with all kinds of good causes. The tables were pushed together to make room for dancing the *pasodoble*, waltz or tango. The most agile would try out the Russian dances of the Red Army. In the early morning, we would peel the baskets of oysters that had arrived out of nowhere, bawling out at the top of our voice a deafening 'Internationale':
'... sera le genre humain! Tsoin-tsoin!'

The atmosphere at these meetings was much like that of the film *Red Kisses*. We thrilled to the exploits of Emil Zatopek and Vladimir

* The *Main-d'Oeuvre Immigrée*, one of the boldest Resistance groups, was recruited by the PCF among immigrants, largely Jewish.

† This Communist women's organisation, presided over by Jeanette Vermeersch, wife of the PCF leader Maurice Thorez, boasted half a million members in the postwar years, but its moralistic and anti-contraception stand led to a rapid decline in the 1960s.

Kuts. Sputnik, the 'space dog' Laika and Yuri Gagarin proclaimed a new era and a promised land. In 1956, the Hungarian uprising had me glued to the radio; not out of sympathy for the insurgent workers' councils, of which I had not the faintest idea, but from anxiety for the fate of the glorious Hungarian football team (Puskas, Czibor, 'golden-head' Kocsis, Hidekuti), of whom there was no news.

The ravages of the Algerian war at this time failed to sow discord among the 'Joyeux Pescosis' social club (the fishing society, which was more a pretext for banquets and card competitions than for country picnics). My father felt no nostalgia for his native land, of which he had a rather disturbed memory. He was never very talkative on the question of Algeria, maintaining a kind of tacit complicity with his Arab customers and sometimes borrowing a postman's cap to launch into an imitation of de Gaulle. One day he chased out of the premises his cousin Henri, a pleasant simpleton who flirted with the OAS and wanted to leave a suitcase of deadly ironmongery with us.

The bistro had a peculiar dividing line between public and private realms. The door leading to the kitchen where we had our meals was always open. Customers had a direct view on our domestic intimacy, and we could carry on a conversation with them without having to put down our knives and forks. So I never experienced the enclosed family that Gide railed against: 'Walled-in homes, closed doors, jealous possession of happiness . . .'. My family was wide open to the world.

Along with the family and the bistro, school was naturally the third component of my world. Being fairly sociable by nature, I was very fond of school, from primary level right through lycée and university. I was never reluctant to go, quite the contrary. At three years of age, kept at home by a childhood infection, I was condemned to have interminable rests under the surveillance of a domestic help whom I forced to play 'doctors and nurses' under penalty of my getting excited and raising my temperature; I demanded that she lift her dress and show me her thighs and suspender belts. She did so, terrified at the idea that my father might surprise her in such a scandalous situation. When children came out of school, I stuck my nose to the misted-up window and enviously watched them walking along with their caps and satchels, stuffed like cornucopias with pens, slates and notebooks.

I wanted to go to school as soon as possible. I can still hear the crunch of chestnut leaves underfoot in the autumn, and feel the skeletons of plane-tree leaves in my hand. I zealously copied the sentences of civic instruction, written in a fine hand on the blackboard each

morning by teachers draped in republican virtue. I warmed to the edifying stories of lives full of courage, devotion and perseverance: Bayard, the Chevalier d'Assas, Bernard Palissy, Pasteur, Bara and Viala (whose fate, of course, we envied . . .).^{*} I loved the practical lessons which unveiled the mysteries of candles and stearic acid, the marvels of asbestos, and the magnetism of an ebonite bar rubbed with chamois-leather. And I adored the *Grand Meaulnes* atmosphere of the playground, the porcelain inkwells sunk into the desks, the smell of violet ink, the 'Sergeant-Major' pens, the coloured maps of Europe pinned to the wall, and the creaking of chalk on the blackboard.

The school I went to was attached to a teacher-training college. The teachers were not only responsible for their own pupils, but also for training assistants who helped with the lessons. The master of the elementary grade embodied in my eyes the severity of the just. A former *résistant* with the profile of a bird of prey, Monsieur Villeroux was a militant anti-clerical and an adept of the Freinet method. He had us typeset our own articles to print on a hand-turned press a little magazine titled *Briques roses*.

Thursday was sometimes the cinema club session, sometimes an outing with the '*francas*', always ready to resume their endless battle with the '*talas*', worthy of *The War of the Buttons*.¹ Since my parents never took holidays (the demands of small business . . .), I spent six weeks each year at a summer camp (CGT!) in Ussat-les-Bains. I never understood, in the 1970s, the *soixant-huitard* contempt for these camps, denounced as a sort of prison or concentration camp for children. After a stifling July in Toulouse, hanging on broadcasts of the progress of the Tour de France, this was my holiday and I enjoyed it.

In autumn 1957 I started the *sixième* class at the new-style lycée of Bellevue. The Algerian events divided the students. My young French teacher, Monsieur Le Bihan, was a Breton Catholic, a fan of Maurras, Barrès and Parnassian poetry. At least he wasn't anti-Semitic. He took me under his wing and undertook to cultivate me, inflicting extracurricular reading and sprinkling me with Péguy, Claudel and Brasillach. Later on, he followed from afar my career as a political activist. Though aware of the hostility of our respective

* The words of the revolutionary 'Chant de Départ': '*De Bara, de Viala, le sort nous fait envie / Ils sont morts, mais ils ont vaincu*' ('The fates of Bara and Viala fill us with envy / They died, but they prevailed').

convictions, he consoled himself with the idea that an admirer of Joan of Arc could never be basically bad.

Shortly before he died he sent me a final letter, dated 27 December 1995, enclosing some old essays of mine:

I beg you to excuse the theft I committed by removing three essays that you wrote in the *sixième* and *cinquième* class from the files, where they would have gathered dust, in a period when I was in charge. You must excuse me for returning them so late, a little stained and mistreated; that is because they have been often read. I never lost sight of you, though I was lightyears away from your constellation, which I shall not mention so as not to poison the atmosphere. The most indulgent verdict of Pierre Boutang was that we could become Marxists as long as we were immortal . . .^{*} You have a perfect understanding of the French language but, to be frank, you don't understand, or not yet, the rotten character of the French revolution [. . .], and you know that Renan claimed France went crazy after the execution of its king. But a man from our midst, a pupil at Bellevue, did get to the heart of the French tragedy and went back to its sources (did you go to Domrémy?).² I send you all my best wishes, and despite your blaspheming, you write sentences that Brasillach might have written.

An affectionate but daunting homage . . .

In 1989, during a debate on the bicentennial of the French revolution, Pierre Chaunu, who boasted of spitting when he passed the Lycée Carnot, told me that, despite being on opposite extremes, we at least had in common a contempt for the fat and self-satisfied bourgeois.[†] A dubious connivance, which I carefully withheld from my mother, who was most punctilious where the Republic was concerned. One day, when the television showed a programme on the English court, my brother-in-law committed the imprudence of casting doubt on the wisdom of regicide. She refused to speak to him for ten years. To rehabilitate royalty, under her roof! There were things on which Mother was inflexible.

* Pierre Boutang, 1916–98, reactionary French philosopher, poet, translator and political journalist, associated with the currents of Maurrasianism and royalism.

† Pierre Chaunu, university professor, reactionary historian of the modern era, author on a thesis on Seville and the Atlantic, one of the most prominent opponents of the May 68 protests at the university.

Errant Paths

It is a mistake of civilized politics not to take pleasure into account, to ignore that it must make up half of all speculation on social happiness. It is morality that leads minds astray on this point, and commits them to a simple politics that speculates on the useful without adding to it the agreeable.

— Charles Fourier

In June 1960, my father died of cancer. His early demise probably spared me the conflicts of adolescence. On the other hand, it did immerse me in a period of morbid meditation, and made me aware of precarious material circumstances. My mother, with my sporadic help, had to run the café herself in order to pay for my schooling. When I left for Paris in 1966, she sold her small business but continued to do housework for a further ten years to end up with a very meagre pension.

The Gaullist coup d'état, the barricades in Algiers and the OAS caused trouble at the lycée. A struggle began that was silent at first, then broke out into open war. Some students took up a warlike posture and belted out the 'Chant des Africains'.^{*} I chose the opposite camp. The influence of family, friends, loved ones? What does it matter? *On s'engage, et puis on voit.*

My mates fell into two very distinct categories: at home and at school. The gang at home hung around the travelling fair, rode scooters without silencers, meticulously styled their hair, wore cowboy boots and faded jeans. Those at school were mostly from well-to-do families. On the one side, apprentices or boys at technical school, on

* 'Song of the Africans': French pro-imperialist song, first composed during the First World War, which later became the anthem of the anti-Algerian independence and *piéd noir* milieux.

the other the 'heirs' in social reproduction. With a foot in both camps, I was fortunately able to frequent the second without breaking with the first. This advantageous social bastardy makes it possible to dream of the stars while keeping your feet on the ground.

My closest friend at both primary school and lycée, Bernard, was the son of our family doctor, Salomon Tauber, whose name in the Resistance had been 'Roger'. He was a Romanian Jew, a Communist municipal councillor, and the administrator of the Varsovie hospital set up to care for Spanish refugees from the civil war. I often spent my Thursdays at the Taubers. After the death of my father, they took me on holiday to their house in Cavalaire. His mother, 'Camo', a leading member of the PCF, had been on the central committee at the time of Liberation.¹ Without going so far as to make iconoclastic criticisms, she was openly hostile to Jeannette Vermeersch and her pronatalist moralism. In 1961, the OAS attacked the Taubers' house with plastic explosive, after which a number of our teachers organised a nightly armed guard. In autumn 1961, Bernard undertook my conversion by giving me the *Communist Manifesto* to read, presenting me solemnly with a copy for myself. I found the multiple prefaces heavy going, and the text itself did not bring me the revelation I expected. Triumphant over my hesitations, Annette proved more convincing than Bernard. She also had Communist parents. Our idyll, begun in the *cinquième*, continued to the *terminale*, punctuated by quarrels and interruptions. She got me to read *Les Thibault*,* listen to Aragon's poems sung by Léo Ferré, and discover *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovitch*. On Thursdays, I skipped the Téfécé [Toulouse football club] training sessions to make the rounds of the city centre shops with her, offering them adverts at a modest price in the lycée paper, *L'Allumeur du Belvédère*. On Wednesdays, we were regulars at the cinema club run by Raymond Bordes and the staff of his excellent cinémathèque. For us, this was first of all an opportunity for petting. Then, the inevitable educational debate on the film offered us a tribune for political agitation without any great heed for the aesthetics of film.

On fine days, Annette climbed aboard my blue cycle, its racing handlebars upturned 'à la papa' for appearances' sake. I pedalled, my

* *Les Thibault*. Series of eight novels by Roger Martin du Gard written between 1920 and 1939, in which the rebellious Jacques emerges from a conventional bourgeois environment. Addresses a great number of questions, such as the pacifism of pre-1914 revolutionaries, faith, euthanasia, freedom of expression, homosexuality, truth and politics. A common point of reference for people of the left in the mid-twentieth century.

nose voluptuously tickled by her brown ponytail, which shook in the manner of those joke pompoms dangled above little kids on fair-ground rides. We followed the slopes of Pechbusque as far as the swimming place at the confluence of the Garonne and the Ariège. Annette's two-piece gingham swimsuit rather turned my head.

I'd not yet heard about the killings of Arabs by the police in October 1961, but the deaths at Charonne in February 1962 revolted me and shook me out of my rut.

The very next day, we established a Jeunesses Communiste group at the lycée. This entry into politics put a definitive end to my football career, as well as my attempts in the theatre. Along with a few friends who were regulars in the cheap seats at the Grenier, we had embarked on a production of Synge, benefiting from the advice of Roger Blin who had come to Toulouse to stage *Waiting for Godot*.^{*} A solitary man, he kindly spent his Sunday mornings with us. Between two rehearsals, drawing on his meerschaum pipe, he asked casually if we'd heard about the 'October group.'[†] As fans of Prévert, we were certainly aware of this cultural episode of the Popular Front. Blin did not point out that he, along with Raymond Bussières and a few others, had been sympathetic to the Left Opposition at that time.[‡] Heresy in those days was still discreet.

An aunt of Annette, a Communist orthodox above all suspicion, slipped into my hands one day a copy of *La Voie Communiste*.[§] She claimed this was to show me the slander of the anti-Communist press,

* Roger Blin, 1907–1984, actor and producer, he participated in the October group. Close to the prewar Trotskyists, he was active in the Parti Communiste Internationaliste after the war. From 1948, he staged the works of Samuel Beckett, and Jean Genet's *The Blacks* and *The Screens*, performances that were disturbed by far-right militants. He was one of the signatories of the Manifesto of the 121 on the right to insubordination during the Algerian war. The manifesto was an open letter signed by 121 intellectuals recognising the legitimacy of the Algerian struggle for independence.

† October group: Theatrical agitprop group of the 1930s, created in the period of the Popular Front government. A split from the Fédération du Théâtre Ouvrier de France, linked to the CGTU and PCF. The poet Jacques Prévert, the actors Raymond Bussière, Jean-Louis Barrault and Roger Blin, the directors Yves Allégret and Jean-Paul Le Chanois, and the singer Mouloudji, all took part.

‡ Raymond Bussières, 1907–1982, French film actor, one of the founders of the October group.

§ *La Voie Communiste*: Monthly defining itself as the organ of the Communist Opposition, created in 1958 by militants around Denis Berger and Félix Guattari, breaking with the entryist tactic of the French FI section which was considered insufficiently dynamic. Engaged, as such, in active support for the Algerian revolution, before breaking up in 1965.

camouflaged as criticism from the left. Was she sincere? Was it a ruse to test me? The fact is that this reading did not scandalise me. The tone of the articles, their insolence towards the clerical leadership of the Party and their criticism of its lukewarm stance on the Algerian question, rather aroused my sympathy. I couldn't know that the anonymity or pseudonyms of its writers concealed such names as Félix Guattari, Lucien Sebag, Denis Berger and Gabriel Cohn-Bendit.*

The combined efforts of Annette and Bernard ended up by enrolling me in their conspiracy. We had received our Jeunesse Communiste cards in the 'Daniel Féry levy', called after the young Communist typographer who had been killed at Charonne. We hardly waited before voicing our dissidence. Whereas our pilot lycée was mixed, the prevailing puritanism still in force was opposed to the mixing of sexes. The boys were affiliated to the Jeunesses Communiste, the girls confined to the gynaeceum of the Union des Jeunes Filles de France (*sic*). At school we attended the same classes, went on the same excursions and travelled on the same school bus, but the Party sought to impose on us a monastic segregation. At the first meeting, a wind of rebellion blew up. First (modest) victory against bureaucratic despotism: we obtained (by derogation!) the right to form a mixed group. It would have been too much for Annette and me to be separated on Thursdays in the name of a red catechism!

This intimacy, won by struggle, did not prevent us from conscientiously studying Politzer's *Principles élémentaires de philosophie*, or devouring the pamphlets of Duclos and Waldeck Rochet – nor, of course, thrilling to the edifying reading of the immortal *Le Fils du*

* Lucien Sebag, 1934–65, a Marxist anthropologist and follower of Claude Lévi-Strauss. He wrote *Marxisme et structuralisme* in an attempt to reconcile the two. He was a member of the PCI and *La Voie Communiste*.

Denis Berger, 1932–2013, teacher, lecturer and then associate professor at Paris VIII. Principal force behind *La Voie Communiste*. Very active in support of the FLN during the Algerian war. He was then active in the PSU, and from 1975 the LCR. There he remained until 1985, serving on the board of the LCR theoretical magazine *Critique communiste*.

Gabriel Cohn-Bendit, born 1936, older brother of Daniel Cohn-Bendit. He joined the PCF as a student in 1956, and then the PCI until 1958, then *La Voie Communiste*, the PSU, Socialisme ou Barbarie, and the *Rouge et Noir* network. After May 68 he was a national officer of l'École Emancipée (a longstanding teachers' union tendency promoting a critical pedagogy). In 1981 he was a co-founder of the experimental self-managing high school in Saint Nazaire. President of the Europe-Écologie federation (environmentalists who scored strongly in the 2009 European election, led by his brother), in 2012 he called for a Hollande vote in both rounds.

people, attributed to comrade Maurice Thorez.* But the cushioned bigotry and Jesuitic distrust that characterized the federal office on the rue Pargaminières already weighed on us. From the first meetings, I heard myself ask in a pale and hesitant voice the sacrilegious questions: 'What about Hungary? And Budapest? What does the Party say about all this?'

Scarcely enrolled, we had an openly contestatory spirit. And from insubordination to conspiracy there is only a short step.

The encounter with Armand Gatti, in 1962, was a breath of oxygen.† He had just shot his film *L'Autre Cristobal* in Cuba, with Jean Bouise.‡ The Grenier de Toulouse showed the 'world premier' of his *Chroniques d'une planète provisoire*. After the screening, Gatti was happy to chat in the back room of the Café Tortoni (today transformed into a McDonald's!) which was our headquarters. Voluble, and perched on the back of a chair, he would talk until midnight under a barrage of questions. About Cuba, Michaux, cinema, theatre. His hands flew around him like magic striped birds. His libertarian attitude carried us away. We drew from these smoky and alcoholic

* Georges Politzer, 1903–42, born in Transylvania (part of Hungary before being taken over by Romania), he participated in the 1919 Hungarian Revolution. In 1921 he met Sigmund Freud in Vienna. A philosophy professor in Paris, he edited the *Revue de Psychologie concrète*. A PCF member, in the university resistance network during WWII, in 1942 he was arrested and shot. Politzer's book on philosophy became the orthodox textbook for Communist militants.

Jacques Duclos, 1896–1975, a pastry chef, repeatedly in prison on account of his anti-militarism. An MP from 1926, then a senator, he was a candidate in the 1969 presidential election. Having joined the PCF upon its foundation, he became a member of its leadership in 1926, where he remained (together with Benoît Frachon and Charles Tillon, and Auguste Lecoœur during the war). On the Comintern Executive in 1935.

Waldeck Rochet, 1905–83, a market-gardener, he joined the Jeunesse Communiste and then the PCF itself in 1924. From 1945 he was on the PCF Politburo. He was elected an MP in 1936, and again after WWII until 1973. He founded *La Terre* in 1937. In prison from 1939 to 1943 before making it to London. The third most important leader of the PCF after Thorez and Duclos, before himself becoming its general secretary in 1964. Disavowed the 1968 Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia.

Le Fils du peuple (Son of the People) was the autobiography of PCF leader Maurice Thorez and became a handbook for very many Communist militants.

† Armand Gatti, born 1924, having been expelled from the seminary, he participated in the Resistance (in the maquis of Georges Gingouin, famed for its radicalism and reprisals against fascists). He was taken prisoner, but escaped from a Hamburg concentration camp. A journalist, traveller and poet, he was a well-known playwright and theatre director (thirty-six experimental plays) and film producer (seven films, including *L'Enclos* in 1961).

‡ Jean Bouise, 1929–89, theatre actor and one of the great supporting actors of French cinema. In more than a hundred films and TV series.

evenings a feeling of wide-open spaces, a taste of rebellion and poetry, far from the confined atmosphere of the local office where the Party bonzes were ensconced in their dullness.

We sometimes had a visit from Gérard (de) Verbizier (known as Verjat).^{*} In terms of ancestry he was authentic. Despite the nobiliary particle, his political genealogy could boast a grandfather who had been the delegate for Haute-Garonne at the Tours congress, in the company of Vincent Auriol.[†] The future president had chosen to remain in the old party, along with Léon Blum, while grandfather 'Ver' had voted for the Soviets. The descendant of glassmakers in the Ariège (one of the few trades that nobles were allowed to practice without derogation), Gérard had family and friends in the region. His frail profile, that of a student out of Dostoevsky, furtively emerged from time to time beneath the arcades of the Place du Capitole, as if he had a bomb hidden beneath his worn-out overcoat. It was only mimeographed pamphlets and scribbles, which he slipped to us discreetly as if they were pornographic curiosities. The plot was under way.

In 1964, I entered the *préparatoire* class at the Lycée Pierre-de-Fermat (as in the famous theorem). The great majority of the *khâgneux* were wildly 'bolshie'. The majority were boarders, who arrived from the Aude, the Ariège, the Gers, the Aveyron and the Tarn. Radicalised by the Algerian war, the Cuban revolution, and by constant brawls with the Occident fascists,[‡] they were not ashamed to wear the student beret and sing 'Pétronille' with a Carcassonne accent! Our circle of Communist students soon counted some forty members.

In these years of the Sino-Soviet conflict, the Havana Declaration and Che Guevara's speech in Algiers, Third Worldism had the wind

* Gérard de Verbizier (Vergeat or Verjat), 1942–2004, descendent of an old Ariège Huguenot family. A history student in Paris, he joined the UEC in 1963, and was one of the founding leaders of the JCR and LCR. A specialist on Asia and the Near East, he worked on many documentaries, including films on the Resistance, the 1942 Vel'd'Hiv round-up of Jews, and *Yiddishland*.

† Vincent Auriol, 1884–1966, a lawyer active in the SFIO from 1905. An MP from 1914 to 1940, and then after the war. He took part in the Popular Front and post-Liberation governments. Hostile to non-intervention in Spain, the Munich agreement and full powers being given to Marshal Pétain. Arrested in 1941, and then under house surveillance, he went underground. President of the French Republic 1947 to 1954. Close to the Parti Socialiste Autonome, he quit the SFIO in 1958. In 1965 he called for a vote for Mitterrand.

‡ Occident: Fascist group brandishing the Celtic cross, founded in 1964 by students led by Pierre Sidos, coming from Jeune Nation. Numerous attacks on Maspero's bookshop, pro-Vietnam committees, Genet's plays, the teaching unions, etc. Several future representatives of the centre-right UMP came from Occident, including Devidjian, Madelin, Goasguen, and Longuet. Banned in 1968.

in its sails. François Maspero published Frantz Fanon, with Sartre's famous preface. We enthusiastically read Che's *Socialism and Man in Cuba*, celebrating a socialist humanism, lyrical and generous, and light years away from the petrified speeches of the Kremlin apparatchiks. In 1965, Althusser's *For Marx* and *Reading Capital* reached us from Paris, with their formidable revelations on theoretical anti-humanism and determination in the last instance. We devotedly devoured these texts, in the grey jackets of the 'Théorie' collection with their austere sobriety, without ever renouncing our right to criticise, having already been initiated by Henri Lefebvre's books into a non-conformist Marxism: his stay in Toulouse after the war had left a fond memory.

Verbizier kept us informed with the latest events in the vitriolic Paris battles that tore apart the UNEF and UEC at the end of the Algerian war. He deciphered for us open-mouthed provincials the arcana of the historic confrontations that opposed orthodox normalisers (shepherded by Roland Leroy), 'Italian capitulationists' (led by Philippe Robrieux and Alain Forner) and authentic Left Oppositionists (ranked behind Alain Krivine and Henri Weber).^{*} He cleverly encouraged us to establish a study circle that was more or less secret, designed for students who 'wanted to learn' and those Party

* Roland Leroy, born 1926, member of the Jeunesse Communistes from 1942, participated in the Resistance. Train driver. Federal Secretary of the Seine-Maritime PCF after the war, he was a member of the Party's central committee (1956–94), Politburo (1964–94) and secretariat (1960–79). Director of the PCF daily *L'Humanité* (1974–94). Long-time PCF MP.

Philippe Robrieux, 1936–2010, general secretary of the UEC from 1959 to 1961, historian of the PCF after having left the Party in 1968. Among his works: *Notre génération communiste*, published by Robert Laffont, 1977, and the four volume *L'histoire intérieure du PC*, published by Fayard between 1980 and 1984.

Alain Forner, 1939–73, general secretary of the UEC from 1962 to 1964, one of the leaders of the 'Italian' tendency, so called because they admired the Italian Communist Party's liberalising spirit.

Alain Krivine, born 1941, history student at the Sorbonne and UEC activist. Expelled from that organisation, he took part in the creation of the JCR and then the LCR and NPA, of which he is a leading member. Candidate in the 1969 and 1974 presidential elections, he was elected an MEP on the joint LCR/Lutte Ouvrière list in 1999.

Henri Weber (Samuel Tisserand), born 1944 at the Leninabad camp, not far from the river Amur. His parents, Polish Jews, had opted for the USSR at the time of the Nazi-Soviet pact. Returning to Poland after 1945, his parents left again for France four years later, fleeing anti-Semitism. His father signed Weber up to Hachomer Hatzair when he was nine. Aged fourteen, he had a spell in a kibbutz, but unlike his brother did not stay in Israel. A member of the UEC, JCR and LC/LCR, of which he was a prominent leader and politburo member. He quit the Ligue in 1980, joining the Parti Socialiste in 1986. A philosopher, he taught at Paris VIII, before being elected a senator for Seine-Maritime.

intellectuals who had displayed tendencies to critical independence (including the historian Rolande Treppe, the Politzerian psychiatrist Rodolphe Roelens, and Dr Jean Garripuy, a former member of Billoux's staff at the ministry of health).^{*} The experience was both brief and conclusive. Already at the second session, devoted to a commented reading of André Gorz's *Strategy for Labour*, Bernard Tauber asked how it was still possible, half a century after October, that Nikita Khrushchev could be toppled by a palace revolution, without the least democratic debate. Growing bolder, we also expressed doubts about the trial of the writers Sinyavsky and Daniel,[†] and even astonished ourselves with our boldness when we asked why the Party did not republish Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg – 'to inform ourselves, even if we don't agree with them'.

Our questions were explosive. Despite our rhetorical precautions, this was too much. Garripuy was furious. We were irresponsible, arrogant youngsters. He only just stopped short of treating us as 'poor little fools'. The Russians had made the Revolution and defeated Nazism; they didn't need lessons from anyone. There were no further meetings. Our experience as temperate oppositionists ran into the ground. But it served its pedagogic purpose.

Distrustful of the storms in Paris, our circle sent two delegates to the UEC congress in spring 1965, with the mission of informing ourselves and getting a clearer perspective. They returned converted to the Left Opposition, assuring us that Krivine and his friends were open, not dogmatic, not sectarian (that was our first concern). But we remained on our provincial guard. The Parisians could speak well, but the cowl doesn't make the monk, or the Bolshevik. We trusted the wisdom of our emissaries, however. The adhesion of Bernard

^{*} Rodolphe Roelens, died 2013, critical psychiatrist. Author of numerous publications, notably with the PCF-aligned Centre d'Études et de Recherches Marxistes and translator of works such as those of Pavlov from Russian.

Rolande Treppe, militant in the Resistance, PCF member, specialist of social history, author of a thesis on the miners of Carmaux, professor at Toulouse University in 1968.

François Billoux, 1903–78, leading PCF figure. Minister several times between 1944 and 1947. Author of *Quand nous étions ministres*.

Jean Garripuy, Communist Party and Resistance activist. General secretary of the Medical Committee of the Resistance and of the Doctors' Union of the Haute Garonne department. Director of the clandestine hospital in the rue de Varsovie in Toulouse.

[†] Yuli Markovich Daniel, 1925–88, Russian writer, poet and translator, arrested in 1965 together with A. Sinyavsky and tried in the Sinyavsky–Daniel trial. Sentenced in February 1966 to five years of hard labour for 'anti-Soviet activity', refused to emigrate and lived after his release in Kaluga.

Tauber, from a Party dynasty above all suspicion, offered a kind of reassuring pledge.

So into the Left Opposition.

The new university year of 1965 was enlivened by preparations for the presidential election in December. Our opposition denounced the PCF's rallying to Mitterrand's candidacy right in the first round. We were equally exasperated by its lukewarm support for the struggle of the Vietnamese people, the cautious 'Peace in Vietnam' being well short of our own slogan 'FLN will win!' The Party's tardy commitment to the Algerian FLN was still remembered. And our ranks included some former '*porteurs de valises*'.

Expulsion was soon in the air. In November 1965, a few weeks before the election, Henri Weber came to give a training course in Pointis, a former fief of the Verbiziers, deep in the rough countryside of the Ariège. The aim was to initiate us, in an accelerated mode, into the history of Stalinism and the bureaucratic counter-revolution. Pierre Broué's *Histoire du parti bolchevique* took pride of place on our shelves, along with Ernest Mandel's *Treatise of Marxist Economics*. These rudiments of historical culture, however, stuck us as rather pale and poorly narrative, compared with the luxuriant conceptual constructions of the Althusserians, who seemed to look down on us from their sanctuary on the rue d'Ulm and the prestigious *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*.

Besides, we did not face expulsion from the Party lightheartedly. Bernard Tauber's father and his friend Stéphane Barsony (Romanian-Hungarian Jewish, International Brigader, *résistant* in the MOI and doctor to the poor) warned us against the manipulations we might be prey to, and against deviations that had so often ended up in the dustbins of history. They reminded us of the bad examples of Doriot and Lecoœur.* Breaking with the Party at this time was like exiling oneself from the class in order to embark on the dead-end adventure of rene-

* Jacques Doriot, 1898–1945, a blue-collar worker, in the Socialist Youth and then general secretary of the Jeunesse Communiste in 1923, as well as being on the executive of the Communist Youth International. A protagonist of the struggle against the occupation of the Ruhr and the Rif war. From 1933 he argued for the united front – as against the PCF's orientation at that point – before founding the Parti Populaire Français, which soon turned towards fascism and then collaboration with the German occupation.

Auguste Lecoœur, 1911–92, a miner from age thirteen, then an engineering worker, he joined the PCF aged sixteen. An organiser of the miners' strikes of 1941 and 1947. Secretary of the clandestine party. After an internal trial he left the PCF in 1954, and together with Pierre Hervé was the driving force behind *La Nation Socialiste*, which supported Messali Hadj against the FLN. He joined the SFIO in 1958.

gade intellectuals. Weber managed however to assuage our doubts by explaining the Machiavellian tactic of entryism. All we had to do was set up an independent youth organisation, which would toughen us and enable us to gain experience. Afterwards, we would return to the fold of the Party, stronger than before, and overthrow the bureaucrats. This unlikely plan actually seemed reasonable to us, we had so great a desire to believe it. More reasonable, in any case, then to defy the great Party of the *fusillés* as a handful of students, our arses between two classes.

The congress of the Union des Étudiantes Communistes was held at Nanterre, the heart of the red belt, at Easter 1966. The Lettres department of the Sorbonne, a bastion of the Left Opposition, had been preventively expelled. Its reintegration was for us a question to be tackled before the congress discussions. The Toulouse delegation included a number of dissidents, chiefly from the *préparatoire* group, including Antoine Artous and myself.* On the margins of the congress, we met the general staff of the expelledes. They strolled around in belted overcoats and austere suits, proud romantic spectres of the insurgents of the Trois Glorieuses or *A Sentimental Education*. We could see in them future Enjolras and Hussonnets, not imagining that only two years later we would actually build our own barricades.

In the large Nanterre gymnasium, under the tight surveillance of a security service made up of Party heavies and municipal employees, the battle was short. Guy Hermier and Jean-Michel Catala, charged with normalisation, settled the matter in summary fashion.† Those of our spokespeople who had not yet been expelled, however, had access to the microphone. Catherine Samary shook her blonde hair vigor-

* Antoine Artous (Tony, Puech), born 1946 in Rodez, philosophy student in Toulouse. Expelled from the UEC, and one of the founding members of the JCR. One of the protagonists of May 68 in Toulouse, then a member of the political bureau of the LCR. Member of the editorial committee of *Critique communiste*, author of many books, including *Marx, l'État et la Politique*, published by Editions Syllepse in 1990.

† Guy Hermier, 1940–2001, national secretary of the PCF student group Union des Étudiants Communistes from 1965 to 1967. He stood for the Party apparatus as against the liberalising ‘pro-Italian’ and Maoist and Trotskyist–Guevarist oppositionists. MP from 1978 until his death, in his final years he turned towards the ‘Refondateurs’, the Eurocommunist wing of the PCF who wanted a new party to the left of the Socialists. He did not, however, leave the PCF, and directed its weekly *Révolution*.

Jean-Michel Catala, born 1942, general secretary of the UEC (1965–76) after the PCF’s clearout of dissidents and oppositionists.

ously.^{*} Pierre Rousset bravely defied the former prosecutors of his father David.[†] The Caen delegates boldly announced that they were joining without regret the authentic revolutionaries banned from the congress. Robert Linhart, representing the 'Ulmards', made what was probably a brilliant intervention, while assiduously avoiding any defence of us.[‡] He was doubtless thinking already of the Maoist split that would be consummated in the autumn. The Althusserians, in other words, abandoned us to the thunder of orthodoxy. The bureaucratic mass had been said. All that remained for us was to leave the congress (and the Party) with head held high, and a red scarf knotted around the neck. My own step was far from assured. The inflamed interventions of my comrades had gone a good way to convince me of the seriousness of the adventure on which we had embarked. Out of emotion, I forgot my suitcase and had to go back and sheepishly ask the municipal Cerberuses to return it to me.

The founding conclave of our dissidence, baptised Jeunesse Communiste Révolutionnaire (for due emphasis), was held in a little room on the first floor of a café on the place Saint-Sulpice. The venue could hardly hold more than fifty people packed together. Alongside the great party of the proletariat with its legendary trade unions, heroic *résistants* and poets covered with laurels, our juvenile conspiracy was quite microscopic. No matter: we felt that we were living one of those historic moments, those founding acts destined to be

* Catherine Samary (Catherine Verla), born 1945 in Cannes, in the Jeunesse Communiste from 1960, then in the PCF's Unir current. An activist of the JCR and LCR, also a member of its central committee. Lecturer at Paris IX Dauphine and author of a thesis published in 1988 on market socialism and self-management in Yugoslavia. Married to Hubert Krivine.

† Pierre Rousset, son of David Rousset, was politically active from a very young age. During his law studies at Assas, he was seriously injured by the far-right Occident group at a demonstration against the war in Vietnam. A specialist on South-East Asia, he has written many articles and books on this question. One of the organisers of the Fourth International's Amsterdam training school.

David Rousset, 1912–97, a Socialist as a student, he then joined the Left-Oppositionist Ligue Communiste and was one of the leaders of the POI from 1936 onwards. Arrested in 1942 for his political work among German soldiers, he was deported to Buchenwald. One of the founders of the Rassemblement Démocratique Révolutionnaire in 1947. An opponent of Nazi and Soviet concentration camps, he wrote the thinly fictionalised *Les jours de notre mort* on his wartime experience, as well as *L'univers concentrationnaire*. A left-Gaullist MP from 1968, he created the Union Travailleuse.

‡ Robert Linhart, born 1944, a sociologist who studied at the École Normale Supérieure. Expelled from the UEC, with others he founded the Maoist UJCML in 1966. After May 68 he became an *établi* (a student militant sent to work in a factory) at the Citroën plant at Paris's Porte de Choisy. It was on this basis that he published a well-regarded work, *L'Établi*, with Minuit in 1978.

remembered, like the separation between the Salle Lancry and the Salle des Gravilliers,* or a miniature Tours congress.

Alain Krivine knew how to put fire in our bellies. He explained in the most serious way possible that the traditional parties, including the Communist Party, had lost all influence among the rebellious youth. The way was clear. We had wide horizons and high hopes. We would see what we would see. There were scarcely two hundred of us, the oldest (Alain himself) being no more than twenty-seven (I had just turned twenty). But we were convinced that the days of Stalinism were numbered (more slowly than we imagined), and that the wind of History was blowing in our favour. In our new magazine, *L'Avant-Garde Jeunesse* (whose title, faithful to tradition, contrasted with the falsely 'trendy' apoliticism of the new orthodox publication, *Nous les Garçons et les Filles*), our spirit of conquest was illustrated by a caricature. A condescending colossus looked down at a tiny figure: 'Is that you, JCR?' And the midget replied: 'Is that you, PCF?'

The return to the fold was testing. On the way out, the Toulouse delegation had travelled with a group ticket, and we had to go back the same way. Châteauroux, Limoges, Brive, Uzerche, Gourdon, Cahors, Montauban: nearly seven interminable hours of hostile looks between the two factions. Our comrades gazed at us silently like lost souls, without yet daring to believe that we had gone over to the class enemy. Even so, we were suspected of desertion, if not treason, and already experienced a vague feeling of exile or quarantine.

At Toulouse I had lunch with Jean Cariven, a comrade whose family belonged to the city's Communist establishment: his grandfather had made the right choice at Tours. Reporting on the congress, a note in *Le Monde* had announced our dissidence and our noisy departure. Jean's father treated us as manipulated little fools (manipulated by whom?). Being outside the local Party nomenklatura, I was necessarily the evil genius of the affair. My friend courageously took up my defence. Father and son were both giants, nearly two metres tall. The scene soon reached a climax. The two titans stood up to their full height. Shouts rang out. Plates flew. Their profiles projected titanic shadows on the wall. I broke into tears amid the broken crockery.

* A reference to the split on 14 July 1869 in the First International between the first commission – based at rue des Gravilliers – and the second, based at rue de la Corderie. The former constituted the Proudhonist, mutualist, apolitical old guard (Tolain) while the latter represented a new tendency which called for a more political class-struggle proto-syndicalism (Varlin).

Despite these tearful farewells, it was without regret that I left the best of possible bureaucratic worlds. What saddened me was the sense of breaking at one and the same stroke with a whole world and its mythology, with a part of my childhood and myself: the heroic tales of the Spanish war, the feats of the MOI, the accordion music of Tony Garcia, the hospitality of the Taubers, my proletarian cousins, and the thousands of ordinary people dreaming amid their everyday routine of scarlet banners and magnificent sunrises. I had no accounts to settle with the Party leadership, but it was painful for me to be seen as a traitor by unknown people whom I valued. The Communist clientele of the bistro made no comments, but the silence was eloquent and almost resigned: I'd gone off to study, and naturally gone over to the other side. Attracted by the promise of social advance, I'd become a class turncoat. They were not astonished, simply sorry.

Carefully cultivated by the Party leaders, the complex of the treason of the intellectuals goes back a long way. To understand its origin, one need only read the memoirs of the Communard Gustave Lefrançais.* The French proletariat experienced early on the felony of the ruling classes. The foundational experiences of June 1848, the siege of Paris and the Commune were not forgotten. They revealed not just the savagery of which the possessors are capable, but also the cowardice and disloyalty of yesterday's republican or democratic allies. Hence a stubborn distrust towards parliamentary politicians, social co-option, coat turning. This is what the revolutionary syndicalism of Sorel and Pelloutier fed on.† It was perpetuated in the radicalism of the CGTU and the recurrence of the 'class against class' theme.‡ This deeply anchored mistrust was all the more tenacious

* Gustave Lefrançais, 1826–1901, active during the French Revolution of 1848. Repeatedly sacked from teaching jobs on account of his activity in socialist organisations. Fled to London after Napoleon III's 1851 coup. Took part in the First International. Elected a member of the council of the Paris Commune, he sat on its labour and finance commissions. Opposed to the declaration of the committee of public safety, but fought on the barricades in defence of the Commune. Fled to Geneva after the victory of the Versaillais, and sentenced to death *in absentia*. In Switzerland, participated in Bakunin's anarchist-inspired Jura Federation. Author of *Souvenirs d'un révolutionnaire. De juin 1848 à la Commune*, republished by Éditions La Fabrique in 2013 with a preface by Daniel Bensaid.

† Fernand Pelloutier, 1867–1901, joined Jules Guesde's Parti Ouvrier in 1892 before gravitating towards anarchism. In 1895 he was elected secretary of the Fédération des Bourses du Travail, devoted to various types of co-operativism, culture and mutual aid. He upheld the idea of revolution by means of a general strike.

‡ CGTU: Confédération Générale du Travail Unitaire, founded upon the 1921–22 exclusion of revolutionaries from the CGT. Driven by anarcho-syndicalists and communists, joining the Red Union International. Rejoined the CGT in 1936.

because the French school and university system set up a formidable machine of social mobility that creamed off elites from the popular classes. This rebounded on intellectuals, viewed as social mutants who fluctuated between classes depending on the balance of forces. What developed in reaction to this was a hardened *ouvriérisme* on which trade-union and political leaderships could play, presenting themselves as the exclusive embodiment of a ventriloquous proletariat. This perverse game reduced many French intellectuals to the rank of a servile intelligentsia, useful for signing petitions and decorating Sunday meetings, but held in suspicion and themselves internalising an indefinable social guilt worthy of Kafka's *The Trial*. Aragon was the very prototype of this ambiguous figure.²

By way of a coup de grâce, I received a note from my cousin Jean, written on the square-ruled paper of a school exercise book. I still have it: 'If you're really going to campaign against Mitterrand, it's because you're a dogmatist, a revisionist, a deviationist, an *ouvriériste*' (that is surprising!), 'at the end of the day a renegade. You're stuck in the age of active minorities that Lenin so severely condemned, and that did us such harm in the Party.' This was the vocabulary of the time. His words hurt me. Despite their ridiculousness, there was no doubting the sincerity of my CGT cousin. Now retired, he's become an active sympathiser of the LCR. Nothing should ever make you despair.

My two years of preparatory class were more occupied with this apprenticeship in dissidence than with preparation for the competitive exam. I particularly wanted to obtain the Ipes,³ which would assure my financial independence by making me a regularly paid teacher. But I had no real expectation of reaching one of the *grandes écoles*. Successful candidates from the Lycée Fermat were rare, the Paris crammers took the lion's share. And I wasn't keen on moving to the capital.

Despite their varied nature, my 'extracurricular' activities were not a waste of time. They opened new fields of interest and gave me a method of work. Charged with a presentation of the birth of national sentiment in French literature, I gained a real success in the *seconde* class from a scrupulous application of Politzer's dialectic to a reading of Du Bellay, Ronsard, and *La Henriade*. My political activism also helped my studies. After being expelled from the Communist student organisation, we formed 'study and research groups' (on Roland Barthes and the new criticism, on Maurice Godelier and the critique of economic rationalism, on Lévi-Strauss and structuralism). This was a kind of ephemeral

autonomous university, and a critical counterweight to the cramming for exams. The paths of radicalisation are tortuous, if not impenetrable.

At the bistro, I continued to do washing up and serve at the apéritif hour, or for Sunday celebrations. My mother looked askance at the birth of a passion for politics that was diverting me from work. We could not permit ourselves such a luxury. Yet she always displayed unflinching solidarity in adversity. In 1962, when the Spanish Communist leader Julian Grimau was executed by the Franco regime, I went on my first violent demonstration under the republican flag from the civil war (at Toulouse, there were as many Spanish young Communists as their French counterparts). The day of the execution, my mother hung up a portrait of Grimau behind the bar, pulled down the grille, and put up a hand-made poster: 'On strike, in solidarity against Francoist repression.' This was the only shop to close on our entire street.

During the *préparatoire* years, a far-right cell one day handed out an anti-Semitic leaflet at the school gate, denouncing me as a Bolshevik troublemaker. The head, a dyed-in-the-wool reactionary, blue to his bones and a great protector of *cyrards*,* had the custom of presiding in white gloves at an annual ceremony commemorating the battle of Austerlitz. He used the incident as a pretext to summon my mother.

This Monsieur L. no doubt thought he could intimidate her and convince her to put pressure on me. I was a scholarship boy and therefore vulnerable. On the eve of the confrontation, I filled my mother in on the anti-Semitic aspect of the affair. On this sensitive point, her hackles rose. In bellicose mood, she set out for the meeting ready for a fight. In the face of danger, she liked to take courage from quoting Victor Hugo: 'Body, are you trembling! If you knew where I am taking you . . .' In the most extreme cases, she preferred a less poetic war-cry, with a frankly Rabelaisian twist: 'In any case, they won't make a hole in my arse; I've got one already!' Faced with such irrefutable wisdom, 'they' had to take care, whether they were Nazis, anti-Semites, or other Ostrogoths.

Monsieur L. had no time even to open his mouth. My mother, on the attack right away, had him against the ropes: 'I've known other clowns of your kind, under the Occupation,' etc. The man in white gloves had expected contrite humility, and was totally thrown by this accusation. His sky-blue flag came down to half-mast. We left with our heads high.

* Boys who went on to the military academy of St Cyr.

‘Did you see, your L., how I ruffled his feathers? He thought he could impress me with his lying airs. He was flabbergasted, all tight, like Brutus . . .’

‘Brutus?’

‘Brutus the lion . . .’

‘. . .?’

‘His skin was so tight that when he closed his mouth he opened his arse . . .’

No matter their lack of academic elegance, these scatological expressions had a vigorous efficacy.

In spring 1966, I passed the ENSET and Saint-Cloud¹ competitions, without great conviction. It was enough for me to have won admission, giving me the right to an Ipes. I failed the ENSET oral exam, however, without regret, after a pitiful and foolish presentation in English (the Toulouse accent being most unsuitable for the language of Shakespeare). No matter! A group of us went off camping (including my fellow-student and the future rector Jean-Paul de Gaudemar), at Saint-Pierre-la-Mer in the Aude.* I was summoned back for the oral at Saint-Cloud. This stroke of luck was above all the occasion for a joyful outing to ‘Le Pantruche’. Bernard Tauber and Jean-Pierre Millet were delighted to accompany me on this expedition. It was hardly a study trip. In the morning, my friends made a leisurely recovery from the previous rowdy night, while I went to discourse on the sonnets of Louise Labé and decipher the geodesic mysteries of a military map. I was not eager to go and look at the posted results. My philosophy teacher told me by phone that I’d been accepted.

On board the valiant 2CV, we headed directly for Bressuire, where the first national training course of the Jeunesse Communiste Révolutionnaire was being held. The perspective of going ‘up to Paris’ hardly enthused me. It meant leaving behind a whole world of friendships and love affairs, closing a happy chapter: the soap bubbles bursting merrily on the pavement washed down by my mother, the rays of sunshine on my chrome handlebars, the vibrations of heat at the end of the over-heated street where the lorries arrived with produce from Cavaillon, Perpignan or Clermont-l’Herault, the blocks of blueish ice deposited outside our door, the refreshing shade of the bistro

* Jean-Paul de Gaudemar, born 1947, Maoist during his youth, former student of the Polytechnique. He was an economist, university professor and then a rector, today an education advisor to the prime minister.

protected by the thick cloth of the awning, red and green with the colours of Monplaisir beer, Louison Bobet's conquest of the Izoard* escorted by his faithful supporters Barbotin and Deledda, the Sunday bets on the races – Jamin or Gélinotte – the low spirits at the Téfécé when Brahimi and Bouchouk left to join the FLN . . .

My years of apprenticeship at the bar served to vaccinate me against certain mythologies that flourished around 1968. I did not recognize myself in the religious cult of the red proletarian, in the genuflections of the Maoist novitiates and their hymns to Mao Zedong Thought (no more, indeed, than in the edifying life of Saint Maurice Thorez or Saint Jacques Duclos). The people of my childhood were not imaginary but flesh and blood. They were capable of both the best and the worst, the most noble dignity as well as the most abject servility. Pierrot, the Communist *résistant* sharpshooter, was so much under the thumb of his employer that on Sundays he would drive his horses to the racecourse for nothing! The same individuals, according to circumstances, were capable of the most surprising courage or the most desolating cowardice. They were not heroes, but rather tragi-comic characters full of wrinkles and contradictions, naïvety and trickery. But they were 'my people'. I had taken their side.

I chose my camp very early on. From the heart, initially. The reasons for this passion remained to be found. The rear mirror easily gives the impression of a journey in a straight line, a single run. And yet how many chances, accidents, events, encounters and partings make up life's journey? A crowd of contingencies, a web of trivialities that make us become – propelled by the force of habit – the determined but unpredictable chaos that we are. Out of all this – a bric-a-brac of examples, stories, readings, scents and sounds – I built myself a superego attached to my shady sides like the cover of a pressure cooker. When the pressure rose, I let a jet of steam escape. The cover held good.

On the pretext of proving that no one chooses their freedom, here I am, despite this wise recommendation, wallowing in the full saga of origins. As soon as you let go the reins a little, the ego escapes and starts cutting capers. It has always to be taken in hand.

* Louison Bobet, winner of the Tour de France, climbed the Izoard pass (2361m) in the Hautes-Alpes in record time in 1953 and 1954.

Hopes and Disappointments

The feeling of shame is one of philosophy's most powerful motifs.

– Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*

To parade in a storm, in clouds that clash together! That is what is unknown in civilization, where no one has yet perfected such curvilinear evolutions as the storm, the anthill, snaking, breaking waves . . .

– Charles Fourier

In autumn 1966, I got off the night train at the Gare d'Austerlitz, with a single trunk containing my clothes and my favourite books. A snapshot taken on the Trocadéro by a street photographer shows me dressed in a blue blazer, looking just like a provincial rugby player who's come up to Paris to play in a match.

In a recent note by the Fondation Saint-Simon, Philippe Raynaud describes me as a 'rustic philosopher'.^{*} The intention was dismissive, but the adjective suits me. It evokes that 'plebeian roughness' dear to Heine: 'To split tough roots, a crude wedge is sometimes needed'.

As for 'philosopher', in these sick times when philosophy sometimes seems like a general medicine for the soul, the word can enable one to draw on a little symbolic capital. I hardly take it more seriously than when my cousins in Toulouse asked me what kind of black market such an exotic trade could be useful for. The word should be reserved for authors who have given their name to a real event in thought, and they are few and far between. I simply became, by the chance of circumstances, a 'teacher of philosophy' and a red hussar of the Republic. 'First, to be fed and clothed,' Hegel said.

* Philippe Raynaud, *Les nouvelles radicalités*, no. 106 of Notes de la Fondation Saint-Simon, Fondation Saint-Simon, 1999.

Philosophy for me, then, is neither a vocation nor a priesthood. Too many abstractions, concepts and systems. My taste runs more to literature. After passing the examinations for the *grandes écoles* with the literature option, I was torn by my rejection of the intellectual division of labour and my interest in the humanities. I ended up choosing philosophy precisely for its lack of discipline. A few decades later, its definition still seems to me just as uncertain. According to Deleuze, 'what is philosophy?' is not an inaugural question. It is rather one of those questions on which a work ends when it has reached maturity. I have chosen not to pose it.

Perhaps contemporary philosophy is only what remains when all the rest has been stripped off (theology, physics, aesthetics, the so-called exact sciences and the so-called human sciences – as if the others were inhuman). Taking Marx's thesis on the death of philosophy seriously, Henri Lefebvre called this remainder not philosophy but 'philosophism'. Deleuze, for his part, saw philosophy as 'a thought that despises thought', designed to make stupidity retreat as far as possible. False modesty – it's a Herculean task!

I began my career at a time when people were more passionate about Lévi-Strauss, Lacan, Saussure, Freud, Braudel and Foucault, than for the bound volumes of classics. In our circles, 'writing degree zero' was then close to literature degree zero, at least as regards fiction. This was a confirmation of Lukács's theory of the novel. Expressing the typical conflict of modernity between a new individualism and a society in the grips of the general explosion of value, the genre had its classic age in the nineteenth century. After a salvo of great existentialist or metaphysical novels (Proust, Musil, Kafka, Lowry, Blanchot), which had been already heralded in the age of Victorian globalisation by the theological epics of Melville and Conrad, the European novel seemed exhausted, reduced to applied phenomenology and floating subjectivity. All it could do today was turn out anecdotes and domestic scenes. Particularly in France, the novel followed the *intimiste* cinema of Rohmer in becoming, with a few brilliant exceptions, the narcissistic mirror of the middle classes, as if setting down in paragraphs and pages the small ads from *Le Nouvel Observateur*: 'Young sporting exec, postgrad, cultured, loves travel, seeks kindred spirit, good-looking, higher ed, with conversation and lively mind . . .' A crowd suffering from the sickness of the century, without the lyricism of Goethe or Musset. This mediocre egoism prefigured the repugnant cynicism of the Houellebecq-Dantec

generation, worshipped by the consensus of *Les Inrockuptibles* and *Le Monde des livres*.

The fires of creation have shifted to other countries and other stages, with the women's novel (Woolf, Duras, Lessing), the anti-totalitarian novel (Bulgakov, Grossmann, Solzhenitsyn), the baroque post-colonial novel (Garcia Marquez, Alejo Carpentier, Vargas Llosa, Lezama Lima, Guimarães Rosa, the West Indian writers). Switching back to philosophy out of disappointment with literature, I admired all the more the inventors of new forms of writing such as Perec;¹ pioneers like the masters of the American thriller (from Hammet to Crumley), a black sociology of modernity; the servants of the text and inventors of forms such as Maurice Nadeau, and workers of language such as Jean-Christophe Bailly and Serge Pey, and much later, Michel Surya.²

Perhaps I wanted to console myself for my frustrations in plunging recklessly into great conceptual architectures. But having arrived late at philosophical culture, I remained in this field an autodidact discovering the classics haphazardly. This is one of the reasons, though not the main one, why I have always kept my distance from the philosophizing fraternity of conferences, seminars and academic high masses.

The year 1966–67 was a rather sorry one. It was prehistory. The cops still wore capes and rode bicycles, the streets had cobbles and the pedestrian crossings were marked with studs. Roads were not yet full of *ronds-points anglais** and sleeping policemen. Squat telephones in black ebonite jumped with surprise when their bells rang. Cycles had derailleur with handlebar levers, and leather saddles moulded to the owner's backside. The clicking of old Underwood typewriters beat time to immortal symphonic creations. Air travel was still an event. It took seven or eight hours, with the night train, to reach Avignon or Toulouse from Paris. A letter was a letter, with its envelope and stamp, and not a telegraphic email. Workers, male and female, had not yet become indifferent 'people'. It was the time before, neither better nor worse, simply different.

At the Saint-Cloud ENS, I shared a soulless room with a manic and Maoisant *agrégation* student (still irradiated by the great red sun perceived from afar in the course of a journey of initiation to Beijing). He was a character of Prussian stiffness, with hair plastered and

* The colloquial and somewhat malicious term for traffic roundabouts giving priority to vehicles already circulating, as opposed to the traditional French rule of yielding priority to the right.

collars starched, his upper lip adorned with a sparse moustache. Fortunately he returned to his native Nord at weekends. The goldfish bowl of the École was somewhat stifling – an incubator with a rarefied atmosphere and a melancholy torpor. Several of my fellow students were haunted by the *acedia* of ancient monasteries. Novelistic ambitions and sexual fantasies were cultivated and simmered. There were those secretly refining their first devilish novel. Others dreamed of the next dance at Sèvres or Fontenay, where they might meet a kindred spirit with whom to share the exhilarating adventure of their first posting in Béthune, Homécourt or Romorantin. Neither the glacial competence of Alexis Philonenko on German philosophy, nor the scholarly joviality and wrinkled smile of Jean-Toussaint Desanti, discoursing on ‘mathematical idealities’, managed to convince me to attend their lectures assiduously.^{*} Somewhat refractory to this greenhouse for neurons, I took the slightest opportunity to return and refresh myself in Toulouse. I became, in other words, a confirmed part-timer.

Intellectually and politically, Saint-Cloud suffered from an inferiority complex in relation to the prestigious rue d’Ulm. The students saw themselves as ‘little provincials’, exiled from the Latin Quarter where the east wind of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (GPCR) was blowing in gusts, with the sorry Nanterre mud-pond as their Sorbonne. The Écoles Normales Supérieures of this time were Communist nurseries. At the legislative elections of 1967, a petition supporting the PCF received the signatures of more than half the Saint-Cloud students. Ulm became the headquarters of the Maoist dissidence. In 1967, when the Shanghai Commune was already being normalised, the new red guards took their vows of intellectual poverty, perhaps even of chastity. Like Saint Francis taking off clothes and shoes, they undertook to strip off the attributes of bourgeois culture, starting with the compromising Pléiade volumes. Omar Diop³ came to my room to confide to me the torments that this enforced renunciation imposed on him.

* Alexis Philonenko, born 1932, historian of philosophy, and a specialist on Fichte and Kant.

Jean-Toussaint Desanti, 1914–2002, philosopher of mathematics, science and phenomenology. Teaching at the Rue d’Ulm and Saint-Cloud ENS, his students included Michel Foucault, Louis Althusser and Jacques Derrida. Member of the Resistance alongside Sartre from late 1940, he was a member of the PCF from 1943 until 1946. Husband of Dominique Desanti.

In this atmosphere of fanaticism, I was caught between two fires, trapped in a no man's land between the orthodox would-be purifiers of the Party, and the exalted zeal of the adorers of the Great-Helmsman-Red-Sun-In-Our-Hearts. Long accustomed to the stereotyped accusations published in *Peking Review* against Yugoslav revisionism, along with praise to the glory of Enver Hoxha, I could not swallow the fables that claimed Chinese surgeons performed miracles without anaesthetic thanks to the sole inspiration of Mao Zedong Thought.

In my first lectures at Saint-Cloud, I noticed a gawky giant, good-humoured and angular, with dark circles round his eyes and auburn hair (which he claimed was 'Venetian'). His out-of-joint Pierrot Lunaire look stood out curiously among the commonplace fauna of the place and the general austerity. I sniffed someone demoniac, a potential deviant, a worker of the negative with a strained relationship with the norm.

Camille Scalabrino had a pronounced Franche-Comté accent and punctuated his rhetorical arabesques with thundering '*vains dieux!*' He called himself a vampire. The fact was that he would sleep the whole day and only come alive at nightfall, whether for a film or musical evening, or simply to spend hours on end meditating on a few pages of Sartre or Merleau-Ponty (never more than half a dozen). At cockcrow he would get down under his duvet.

Having had Pierre Lantz as his teacher at Besançon, he proudly proclaimed himself a 'Sartrean', brazenly confronting the Althusserian wave.[†] I set out to convince him to break with the Party. Despite being excluded myself, I accompanied him on Sundays selling *L'Humanité-Dimanche* door to door in the housing estates of Suresnes or Puteaux. He proved very stubborn. Citing *The Communists and Peace*, he maintained that the Party, with its anchorage in the working class, would always end up on its feet, whatever its mistakes. All the same, our friendly complicity ended up forming the kernel of a confidential plot around which a number of other conspirators gathered.⁴ It was a pleasant task to face down the serried ranks of the

* Camille Scalabrino (Paulet), originally from Besançon. Graduate of the Saint-Cloud École Normale Supérieure. A professor at the University of Grenoble. A Cambodia specialist. After leaving the LCR, he was for a time secretary of the Mouvement des Citoyens in the Doubs region.

† Pierre Lantz, born 1931, philosophy specialist. Activist in the Parti Socialiste Unifié and of the pro-choice and pro-contraception MLAC in Besançon. Professor of sociology at the university of Franche-Comté. Also taught at Paris VIII. Retired. A participant in the Société Louise Michel, founded by Daniel Bensaid.

Union des Jeunesses Communistes Marxistes-Léninistes and their prestigious *gédéons*.⁵

Our real life was certainly not at the École. At Easter 1967, the first congress of the JCR was solemnly held on the rue des Horticulteurs. I was elected (co-opted?) onto the national leadership. Our wretched dilapidated office, on rue Servan, didn't even have electricity. The duplicator was turned by hand. The candles that lit our meetings cast disturbing shadows on the walls, giving an epic sense to our night-time discussions. I belonged to the 'socio-philos' group, which generally met on the rue Boissonnade, in David Rousset's cellar.⁶ Running between a demonstration on Vietnam and a UNEF meeting, we still found time to publish *L'Avant-Garde jeunesse*, our modest and irregular paper, printed at the offices of Simon Blumenthal, former member of the FLN support network.* We could then go on to enjoy, with a sense of duty accomplished, a film noir on rue Champollion, gorge ourselves on couscous on rue de la Huchette, and finish up at La Joie de Lire, open until midnight. When I missed the last Saint-Cloud train, which left at 01:07, I took refuge on friend Verbizier's couch. He lived in an attic on rue Scheffer, reached by a prehistoric lift, whose counterweight was worked by pulling vigorously on the rope.

The JCR was led by a current linked with the Fourth International, with Alain Krivine, Henri Weber and Gérard Verbizier being its main driving force. There was also, around François Fourquet, a small group from Sciences-Po, which had emerged from the former *Voie Communiste* and was linked with the *Bulletin de l'Opposition de gauche* inspired by Félix Guattari.[†] Finally, a vague tendency embodied by Jeanette Habel could be described more or less as Guevarist.[‡] It was to this that I felt closest.

* Simon Blumenthal, died in 2009, oppositionist in the PCF. Leading member of the *Voie Communiste* group. Imprisoned during the Algerian war for his support for the FLN. Printer then lawyer.

† François Fourquet, professor of economics at Paris VIII. He was secretary of the La Borde psychiatric clinic (1966-72) and treasurer of the CERFI (Centre d'études, de recherche et de formation institutionnelles) created by Félix Guattari. In 'L'idéal historique', a text that appeared in the journal *Recherches* in 1974 and then as a book in the 10/18 collection, he criticised the traditional model of the self-sacrificing professional militant.

‡ Jeannette Habel, the best-known pseudonym of J. Piennkny (alias Dominique) Clélia, born 1938. Her mother was a home-based dressmaker, her father a Yiddish-speaking Polish-Jewish Communist who arrived in France in 1936. A member of the Jeunesse Communiste from her final year at high school, she was one of the founders of the JCR then of the LCR. Fascinated by Guevarist actions, she became a Latin America specialist and is the author of a number of books on Cuba and other subjects. She is now professor at the Université de Marne-la-Vallée.

As Sundays at Saint-Cloud were even more gloomy than those at Ville-d'Avray, I preferred to accompany Fourquet or Verbizier to the La Borde hospital at Cours-Cheverny. These visits were my initiation to institutional psychotherapy. They also enabled me to get to know Félix Guattari. Despite the proclaimed deconstruction of the hospital hierarchy and architecture, he was the geometrical centre and charismatic pivot of this supposedly a-centric and rhizomatic world, over which he exercised an unchallenged anti-authoritarian authority.

The 1967 academic year began under quite different auspices. There was an electric charge in the air – if this is not a retrospective illusion.

At the second JCR summer school in Bressuire I came across Martine again, a student of sociology at Toulouse. I had already met her under the arcades of the place du Capitole. She was as bronzed as a warm croissant, and had an ironically absent gaze rather like Marie Trintignant. At the 14 July dance, old songs, emotions, starry night. We decided to move in together at the coming *rentrée*. As Alain Brossat and Denise Avenas were also looking for somewhere to live, we formed an embryonic commune, or soviet, in a rented apartment on the border of Garches and Saint-Cloud.* Goodbye the sinister ENS residence, the psycho-rigid roommate, and breakfasts on the *qui-vive*, where I had to keep a jug of boiling milk handy to fend off possible aggression from a fanatical red guard who'd got out of bed on the wrong side.

Alain Brossat and I had both completed our *licence*, getting the final certificate in the autumn session. While lining up in the Nanterre corridors, waiting to hear Mikel Dufrenne on the transcendental aesthetic, we had our heads elsewhere.† The newspaper headlines announced the death of Che in Bolivia. We were incredulous and couldn't accept it. A myth is immortal. But we still scrutinised in perplexity the photos of his Christ-like corpse, seeking in vain for

* Alain Brossat (Noiraut), philosophy professor at the Paris VIII university. Member of the LCR central committee as well as the editorial committees of *Critique communiste* and the daily *Rouge*. Left the LCR in the 1980s. His works include *Le Yiddishland révolutionnaire*, written together with Sylvia Klingberg.

Denise Avenas, lecturer, author of many works including *La pensée de Léon Trotsky*, Privat, 1975. In *Le Bois du Seigneur* (published by Joseph Clims, 1987), she recounted the story of her peasant family in the Vivarais region. She was a member of the editorial committee of *Critique communiste* and director of publication of the *Cahiers du Féminisme* until 1984.

† Mikel Dufrenne, 1910–95, philosopher of aesthetics. Professor at University of Poitiers and then Paris-Nanterre.

false evidence in the curve of the forehead or the shape of the beard. Che had been our best antidote to the Maoist mystique. Jeanette Habel had translated *Socialism and Man in Cuba*, which she'd brought back from Havana. Che's speech in Algiers had given us a bold denunciation of Soviet bureaucratic egoism. His testamentary message to the Tricontinental conference was the internationalist manifesto of our generation. We felt with Che the 'tragic isolation' of the Vietnamese people, which dictated to us the categorical imperative of solidarity: 'Create two, three, several Vietnams!' Against the Soviet or Chinese hierarchs with their fatal wrestling match at the expense of the Indochinese peoples, we felt invested with an internationalist mission, and sought a path for ourselves alongside OLAS – the Latin American Solidarity Organisation.⁷

Our meeting in homage to the heroic *guerrillero* filled the hall of the Mutualité. Maurice Nadeau, just returned from Havana where he had attended the OLAS conference, gave the keynote speech.* Ernest Mandel traced a portrait of Che as he remembered him from the 1964 economic debate over moral and material incentives. We sung the 'Chant des martyrs' with a frog in the throat ('*Vous êtes tom-om-ombés . . .*'), or rather, accompanied the record in a hesitant voice, vigorously joining in the chorus to give ourselves courage: '*Mais l'heure a sonné, et le peuple vainqueur . . .*'

There was fire in the air at the 1967 *rentrée*. The US bombing of Vietnam had intensified. In France, Gaullist decrees sparked off a rise in social agitation. Following the emblematic strike at Rhodiaceta, those of Caen and Redon turned into riots. We were active full-time on the Nanterre campus, where the JCR was well established.⁸

Nanterre-la-Folie well deserved its name. The press of the time often described the muddy no man's land of the campus, wedged between the shantytowns photographed by Élie Kagan during the Algerian war and the HLM public housing blocks, still thin on the ground. The shack that served as a station looked like the ramshackle railway depots of the American West, lost at the edge of the desert. Once on the campus, you spent the day between cafeteria, university

* Maurice Nadeau, 1911–2013, teacher and later writer and editor. Trotskyist from the 1930s, participated in the Resistance. In 1945 he published a history of surrealism which is still a work of reference. A literary critic for *Combat* after 1945, then for *France Observateur* and *L'Express*. A signatory of the manifesto of the 121. Editor with Denoël and then with Robert Laffont. In 1966, he founded the twice-monthly *La Quinzaine littéraire*, and his own publishing company in 1977.

restaurant and residence, without bothering much with the lectures. One meeting followed another. The greater part of the time, we made common cause with the group of anarchists led by Jean-Pierre Duteuil and Daniel Cohn-Bendit.* When a fascist squad from Occident arrived from Paris for an unannounced incursion on our (almost) free territory, Xavier Langlade and Jacques Tarnero organised the self-defence of this impregnable fortress.† When dean Grapin, in contravention of the principles of university freedom, authorised the police to intervene inside the buildings, they met with the same fate as the Nazi invaders and were promptly booted out.

These varied and overflowing activities scarcely left any time for study. Brossat and I were enrolled for the *maîtrise* degree under Henri Lefebvre. Alain bravely tackled 'the notion of change of terrain' in Althusser and Foucault. Inspired by a political sixth sense, I chose as my subject 'Lenin's notion of revolutionary crisis'. Lefebvre calmly agreed to supervise this heterodox 'research'. We were also supposed to take Paul Ricoeur's seminar on Cassirer and symbolic forms. We had bigger fish to fry than playing around with hermeneutic subtleties, all the more so as Ricoeur then appeared the epitome of a past age of philosophy, condemned to the dustbin of prehistory by the new structuralist hegemony.

The little we did learn that year was 'by the fireside'. Brossat got out his conceptual shovel to tackle the change of terrain. Denise Avenas studiously annotated *Capital* in order to initiate a group of lycéens from Rueil in the labour theory of value. Between reading Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* and Perec's *Les Choses*, Martine applied herself moderately to sociology, preferably from the standpoint of detective novels. As for me, like the autodidact in Sartre's *Nausea*, I read in chronological order almost the whole complete works of Lenin, bought in packets of five at the end of each month from the Racine bookstore.

The student movement was gathering strength in Germany and Italy. A handful of us (once again, JCR and anarchists together) had protested the repression against Karol Modzelewski and Jacek Kuron in Poland, on the deserted and frozen esplanade of the Invalides. We

* Jean-Pierre Duteuil, born 1944, sociology student at Nanterre. Took part in the creation of the 22 March Movement. An anarchist, he moved to Vienna in 1977. Founder of Editions Acratie.

† Jacques Tarnero, libertarian activist in 22 March Movement at Nanterre. Now a documentary filmmaker and pro-Zionist activist.

distributed their 'Open Letter to the Polish Workers' Party', which we had translated and mimeographed. In February 1968, we travelled *nach Berlin* to demonstrate for Vietnam. International demonstrations were not yet a general practice. Berlin, with its 'critical university' organized by SDS students, stood as the capital of contestation, poised between the two Europes. The name of Adorno did not mean much to us. All we knew of Marcuse was *Eros and Civilization*, translated by Boris Fraenkel for Éditions de Minuit.* *One-Dimensional Man* did not appear in French until autumn 1968. On the other hand, we were familiar with the influence that Lefebvre exercised on the Situationist International with his critique of everyday life.

We filled a coach from Nanterre for the Berlin expedition. The passengers included Manuel Castells, then a graduate tutor in sociology, Paolo Paranagua, a very young surrealist and the son of a Brazilian diplomat, and Sophie Petersen.† The journey across the snowy wastes of January took more than twenty-four hours. To kill time, we rehearsed revolutionary songs and followed on the radio the exploits of Jean-Claude Killy at the winter Olympics in Grenoble. At the GDR border, informed in advance that we were travelling to Berlin for a just cause, the Vopos gave us quite a welcome. Alain Krivine already had special ties with the SDS. Rudi Dutschke, its charismatic leader, honoured us with a visit on the evening before the demo. The magnetic charm of this small man overflowing with joyful malice worked its spell. The following day, nearly half a century after the murder of Rosa Luxemburg, we paraded down the Kurfürstendamm several thousand strong. The young crowd sung good-humouredly: '*Wir sind eine kleine, radikale Minderheit!*'"⁹

On return to Paris, this 'small radical minority' was more fervent than ever. It was in this effervescence that Xavier Langlade was arrested during a demonstration against the American Express office. The next day, over our morning café-crème, Brossat proposed a

* Boris Fraenkel, born 1921 in Danzig, arrived stateless in France in 1938. After the war he was secretary of Sonia Delaunay, then a driving force in the CEMEA. A translator and populariser of the works of Reich and Marcuse. An OCI activist, but expelled in 1966. Had a notable influence on J.-M. Brohm and Lionel Jospin. Committed suicide on 23 April 2006.

† Paulo Antonio Paranagua, ex-USFI member of Brazilian origin. Member of the Paris surrealist group. After May 68 he was the driving force in the LC's cell at Renault-Billancourt. In 1974 in Argentina he led the Red Faction, expelled from the PRT Combatiente. Having been imprisoned and tortured he returned to France. He helped to put together the cultural section of the daily *Rouge*, then became a journalist at *Le Monde*, where he is still today the Latin America specialist.

solidarity action that broke the customary routine. Instead of carefully unfolding our banners, we would make use of our talent for graffiti within the lecture rooms and theatres. At a time when stencils and spray paint were not yet common practice, this simple written transgression had an explosive effect. The big inside windows sprouted maxims propitious to meditation, such as 'Transparency is not transcendent'. The anonymous hand that traced these words could not know that thirty years later the ideal of transparency would become the mantra of the media panopticon, and that the 'desire for *transpartition*'¹⁰ would consume the great confraternity of the visible. No matter: the muralist-poetic explosion of May had begun.

Steadily building up to a climax, the day reached an apotheosis with the symbolic desecration of an occupied council chamber. Some sixty mutineers celebrated the event through to the early hours of the morning. My responsibility as militant, however, deprived me of this joyful dénouement; that evening I was holding a meeting with young workers at Levallois. Buoyed up by this memorable day, we organised an open day at the uni. The sunshine played its part. Commissions romped around on the mangy lawn. The 22 March Movement was born from this fun and games. It defined itself as anti-imperialist (solidarity with the Indochinese and Cuban peoples), anti-bureaucratic (solidarity with the Polish students and the Prague Spring), and anti-capitalist (solidarity with the workers of Caen and Redon).

The JCR took advantage of the Easter break to hold a conclave. We were a hair's breadth away from coming to blows – with chairs – on a minor question about the elections to the student association. Supported by the champions of a traditional student unionism (who included Guy Hocquenghem and Henri Maler*), Henri Weber criticised our Nanterre commune for its compromising alliance with the libertarians. The Lambertist false (enemy) brothers even accused me of having vulgarly insulted the unions and UNEF.[†] This was nothing but slander. Without claiming to have been a fervent feminist from the word go, words like *bordel* and *putain* just weren't in my vocabulary.

* Henri Maler (Rivière), JCR activist in 1968, then in the LC, which he left to help found Révolution! Having taught secondary school philosophy, he was a senior lecturer in political science at Paris VIII. In 1996 he founded Acrimed (Action Critique Médias), close to the anti-neoliberal left.

† Lambertists: Term used from 1955 to designate the supporters of Pierre Lambert, one of the leaders of the majority of the PCI, but expelled by the majority leadership in 1952 for refusing to apply the entryist tactic. Created the OCI in 1965, today in the Parti Ouvrier Indépendant.

This was how matters stood when the news reached us of the shooting of Rudi Dutschke, while he was cycling down a Berlin street. He was in a coma, between life and death. We could see him, brimming over with life, galvanising the Berlin demo for Vietnam. Together with the anarchists, we went off straight away to demonstrate in front of the German embassy. The small procession was reluctant to disperse. A notice spread by word of mouth fixed a new rendezvous on the Boul'Mich. There, the police tried to intervene, putting our little troop in a fury. On the corner of the rue des Écoles, we started to hurl everything to hand: glasses, cups, carafes, chairs and tables from the Sélect Latin café started flying. The traffic lights were overturned, the iron grilles torn from the base of trees. It was one of those unpredictable moments when fear of the helmet and the truncheon evaporate like magic. We suddenly felt invulnerable. It was only after the event that we understood the imperceptible signs that announced an imminent change of air. The Berlin demonstration thus appeared a posteriori as a kind of prologue to May 68, and the Easter brawls in the Latin Quarter as the prefiguration of the barricades on the rue Gay-Lussac.

After this flare-up, it still seemed as if the university year would smoothly run its course. It was time for me to think of finishing my dissertation on Lenin and the crisis. Martine and I hitchhiked off for a studious retreat in my mother's cabin at Saint-Pierre-la-Mer. Stopping over in Toulouse, we harangued a full amphitheatre in the Albert-Lautman building (named after the great logician, and uncle of Alain Krivine, executed by the Nazis), giving them a detailed presentation of the Nanterre epic. Geared up in this way, the audience went out to demonstrate, brushing away in passing a group from Occident (which no doubt included Bernard Antony, the future 'Romain Marie' of the Front National).^{*} The 25 April movement was born, the local little brother of the '22 March'.

We left for the Mediterranean coast with a sense of duty accomplished. The weather was magnificent. We spent long hours broiling on the rocks, while I annotated weighty volumes of Lenin. In the mornings, I jogged to the little port of Brossolette to buy *Le Monde*. One fine day, the headlines announced that the Sorbonne had been occupied by the police, and the Latin Quarter was rioting. We immediately packed up Lenin, swimming costumes and sun creams.

^{*} Bernard Anthony, born 1944, French extreme right-wing politician, from 1984 to 2006 member of the Front National.

The JCR had wisely booked the big hall of the Mutualité for a European meeting on 9 May. I was to speak as a militant of the '22 March', alongside Ernest Mandel, Massimo Gorla (future Italian deputy), Paolo Flores d'Arcais (recently, along with Nanni Moretti, one of the leaders of the *girotondi* against Berlusconi) and Henri Weber.* The afternoon saw an improvised 'sit-out' in the place de la Sorbonne, where Dany Cohn-Bendit sharply attacked Aragon as a Stalinist toad. As time progressed, we began to worry about the fate of our meeting. Weber then had the idea of offering it to the movement by opening up the platform and removing (in an innovative 'no logo' operation) the signs we'd put up. Cohn-Bendit added himself to the speakers initially planned. The following day was the white night of the barricades.

Starting from the old lion at Denfert, the protest demonstration against the closing of the Sorbonne reached the Luxembourg intersection, where it hesitated without deciding to disperse. Suddenly we heard muted shots. People started taking up paving stones. Provocation? Innovation? A symbolic rehearsal of a gesture evoking the glorious precedents of the rue Saint-Merri, the rue de la Fontaine-au-Roi (defended by Varlin, Ferré and Jean-Baptiste Clément), the rue Ramponeau (where Lissagaray fired) and the Ledru-Rollin crossroads (where deputy Baudin had fallen)?† At

* Massimo Gorla, 1933–2004, architect. From 1953 a member of the Italian Socialist Party, then in the Gruppi Comunisti Rivoluzionari (Italian section of the USFI, he himself being a member of the Secretariat). Charged with entry work in the Italian Communist Party. Attended the 9 May 1968 JCR meeting in Paris, open to the movement. Founding member of Avanguardia Operaia and an MP for Democrazia Proletaria, which would ultimately converge (without him) into Rifondazione Comunista.

Paolo Flores d'Arcais, born 1944, Italian philosopher and journalist, editor of the magazine *MicroMega*, influenced by the thinking of Albert Camus and Hannah Arendt. In his youth a member of the youth federation of the Italian Communist Party and the Italian section of the Fourth International, later an adherent of 'radical reformism'.

† Eugène Varlin, 1839–71, born into a poor peasant family, a Proudhonist from a young age. He was active in organising bookbinders' strikes and creating a mutual-aid society among the workers of this profession. Took part in the first two congresses of the First International. A participant in the 31 October 1870 and 18 March 1871 uprisings, he was elected to the council of the Paris Commune. He opposed the creation of the committee of public safety. Killed during the suppression of the Commune on 28 May.

Théophile Ferré, 1846–71, a legal clerk, delegate to the Comité central républicain and member of the National Guard. Upon the 18 March 1871 proclamation of the Paris Commune, he advocated immediately marching on Versailles, seat of the Thiers government. Elected to the Commune's council, he was delegated to public safety. Condemned to death by the post-Commune Satory tribunal, he was executed.

Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray, 1838–1901, journalist and independent socialist, author of a history of the Paris Commune long banned in France and translated into English by

several points we had the feeling that the fire would go out with nightfall. But chainsaws appeared from no one knew where. Trees were chopped down. Overturned cars were transformed into ramparts, with loopholes and machicolations. The barricade-builders rivalled one another in imagination, as if competing for the most handsome subversive construction, decorating the paving stones with flowerpots, streamers, bits of bric-a-brac. The most grotesquely useless barricade was erected, by a kind of irony, whether deliberate or not, before the impasse Royer-Collard! All the same, its defenders showed no less refractory determination to any idea of surrender.

In the early hours of the morning we found ourselves, with Alain Krivine and a handful of escapees, red-eyed and tearful, in the courtyard of the ENS on the rue d'Ulm. A few Maoist *normaliens* who had gone home to sleep the previous evening, denouncing this craze for 'petty-bourgeois gardening', emerged penitent from their scarlet dreams.

May 68 had begun.

There is no point in pursuing in detail here the vicissitudes of that month, lived from day to day in a confusion comparable to that of Fabrice at Waterloo.¹¹ We marched beneath the walls at Renault-Billancourt factory as if they would crumble, like the walls of Jericho, at the sound of our hoarse megaphones. Sent to spread the good word in Brussels, I was expelled from Belgium and banned from returning there after a smoky meeting at the Maillot Jaune brasserie. A motorised column of Belgian militants escorted the car of the mayor of the Saint-Gilles faubourg, who drove me back to France. We held regular educational meetings at the Sorbonne, and published a modest daily two-sided bulletin, simply titled *Aujourd'hui*. I generally edited it along with Henri Weber and Guy Hocquenghem. The night that the Bourse was fired, Krivine, Weber and I had tried to rise above the business at hand to reflect on the course of events. We could feel, on 24 May, that the movement had reached a turning point. Hardly had

Eleanor Marx. In exile for a time, he was secretary general of the Société des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen created in opposition to General Boulanger.

Jean-Baptiste Baudin, 1811–51, a doctor and MP for Jura, killed on a barricade set up at the Faubourg Saint-Antoine in opposition to the 2 December 1851 coup d'état by Napoleon III. When workers derisively asked the MPs who had come to support them, 'Do you reckon we're going to get ourselves killed to save your twenty-five francs a day?' Baudin replied, 'No, you'll see us dying for twenty-five francs.'

we arrived at his apartment on the rue Saint-Georges than Alain opened a can of sardines and switched on the radio. Fighting was still under way in the Quarter. Henri saw this as confirmation that imagination had run its course, and the movement was starting to chase its own tail. Ever the activist, Alain wanted to go back in the middle of the night and tour the last barricades. Annoyed by this feverish agitation, Henri went home to sleep. He was probably right. On the boulevard Raspail, Alain and I were suddenly picked up by large arms and thrown into a camouflaged truck with disturbing upholstery. But this was only intimidation.

At the end of June, the government dissolved the JCR along with other organisations, including La Voix Ouvrière (today Lutte Ouvrière). A dozen comrades, including Pierre Rousset, Isaac Johsua and Alain Krivine (too well known already not to be troublesome underground) found themselves in the Santé prison, while a number of women comrades, including Pierrette Chenot, were imprisoned in the Roquette.* We took advantage of the summer to renew the loosened connections between local groups, establish letterboxes and trustworthy connections as the basis of an underground structure, and prepare for a rousing *rentrée*.

Through the good offices of Jean Labib, Weber and I found refuge at 5, rue Saint-Benoît, the home of Marguerite Duras.† From the standpoint of security, this hardly discreet retreat in the heart of Saint-Germain-des-Prés was quite absurd. It was impossible to go down and buy a baguette at the Buci market without meeting an acquaintance. So we remained holed up for most of the time. July brought a heatwave. We were contracted to deliver to Maspero by autumn a book on the May events, written on the hoof, without distance, documentation or archives, and above all without experience of writing. Though doubtful, Marguerite was tactful enough not to discourage us. To sustain our literary enthusiasm, we discovered beneath the sink a reserve of Pisse-Dru. Marguerite was working on a film, and brought home remains from the set buffet that we feasted on. One day, while she was out, we had a visit from a group of

* Isaac Johsua (Créach), LC activist and then one of the founders of Révolution! together with his brother Samuel and comrade Henri Maler. Professor of economic science at the Université d'Orsay Paris XI.

Pierrette Chenot, LC's treasurer in the 1970s.

† Jean Labib, history student in 1968. Now a film director and producer (La Compagnie des Phares et Balises).

hangdog 'Katangais', come to shake down 'the old woman' (*sic*) in the name of the proletariat.' We showed them the door. Marguerite was pleased to have two devoted bodyguards at home, but also installed an oculus.

While we were bent over our holiday task, Marguerite often received an evening visit from Dionys Mascolo, Robert Antelme and Maurice Blanchot. They were the instigators of the Comité Étudiants-Écrivains, whose manifesto, published in *Les Lettres nouvelles*, rashly decided to do without its authors' signature. To our great shame, we had not yet read either Antelme's *L'Espèce humaine* or Mascolo's *Le Communisme*, and not even much of Blanchot apart from *Thomas l'Obscur*. Henri knew Marguerite Duras's *The Sea Wall*. I sought to fill my lacunae by taking down from the shelves *Ten-Thirty on a Summer Night* and *The Afternoon of Mr Andesmas*. Single-mindedly pursuing our political tasks, we did not show any curiosity, nor hardly pay attention, to the discussions of our hosts. I still regret today having missed out on a valuable encounter.

For a while, Marguerite agreed to serve as a letterbox and receive mail for the Ligue. I went to pick up this mail, keeping her company while she breakfasted on fried eggs at the brasserie of Le Pré aux Clercs.

In August, Henri and I separately pursued our writing work before meeting up near Vauvert in the Gard, in a farmhouse belonging to the Lamour family. Catherine Lamour, the partner of the economist Michel Gutelman, a specialist on agrarian questions, had just joined the Ligue.[†] Between *abrivade* and the local beef stew, we organised

* Katangais: Group of violent, politically unaffiliated and lumpen youth grouped around 'Jackie (or Jimmy) le Katangais' (Jean-Claude Lemire, a deliveryman who was killed by a deserter from the Foreign Legion in June 1968 and whose body was left abandoned in a forest in the *département* of the Eure), who claimed to be a former mercenary having served in Katanga in the Congo. The group formed a 'Comité d'Intervention Rapide', which carried out risky actions and participated in the occupation of the Sorbonne but who were also accused of intimidation and theft. Relations with the student occupiers were tense and ultimately erupted in physical confrontations between the two groups in June. In the end, the Katangais were expelled from the university buildings. Often associated by the politically organised in 68 with thuggery and provocateurs, the term is sometimes used more generally to refer to 'hard-core' and ultra-radical elements, similar to the *zonards* and, later, the '*casseurs*'.

† Catherine Lamour, LCR member. Producer, journalist, writer, and editorial director of book series (Stock, Grasset, Le Seuil, Fayard).

Michel Gutelman, researcher at the CNRS. Specialist of agrarian reform.

expeditions to whitewash the (almost indelible) slogan 'Free Krivine and Rousset!' on the asphalt.

During this time, Jean Labib and Michel Rotman were crossing France to restore communications with local groups and set up a system of regular dues, which we urgently needed.* Despite our national leadership being partly decapitated by the arrests, the groups responded to the needs of the situation as best they could. The same happened at the time of our second dissolution, in June 1973. Despite its Leninist reputation, our loose organisation suited its leaders very well. A bomb could have wiped out the central committee without its ceasing to function, each activist being a conspiracy on their own account.

Rotman and Labib had done their work well. By the end of August, we were able to bring together almost our entire national leadership in Brussels – apart from those still in the Santé prison – after discreetly crossing the border through fields of beetroots and hops. Reunions, emotions, effusions, stories . . . The theoretical-practical conclusion was that May 68 was just a beginning, a 'dress rehearsal', a pale copy of February 1917 in Russia. We had to harness ourselves without delay for the preparations for October. The advance that Maspero paid the authors of *Mai 68, répétition générale*, financed the launch of our *Iskra*, a paper with the task of 'collective organiser', whose title, chosen on the advice of Jean Schalit, proudly proclaimed its colour – *Rouge*.†

Our stay in Brussels was long enough to rouse our sympathy with the likes of Marx, Hugo and all those other poor souls forced to seek refuge in Belgium in the wake of the vicissitudes of repression. The generous hospitality of our Belgian comrades wasn't the problem – quite the contrary. We were housed in the secret premises of the Belgian section of the Fourth International, amid piles of unsold magazines and papers, smelling of mould and cold tobacco. But nothing in this city could gain-say the aversion it inspired in Baudelaire. The place de Brouckère had lost the charm that it still had for the ancestors of Jacques Brel. The cool beers swallowed on the place de l'Hôtel-de-Ville (close to where Marx stayed in 1846) and the *moules-frites* at Chez Léon (not yet become the international chain specialized in generic molluscs and soggy chips) was not even enough to cheer up our miniature exile.

* Michel Rotman ('Béthel'), doctor and member of the LC political bureau from its creation. Today a TV and film producer, he produced many documentaries including *Révolutionnaires du Yiddishland*.

† Jean Schalit, born 1937, leader of the UEC. Expelled in 1966. Founded the weekly *Action* (1968). Works in the press and advertising.

Given the social composition of our organisation, the great majority being lycéens or university students, the academic *rentrée* was the big date. We received a visit in Brussels from a PSU delegation led by Marc Huergon and Jacques Sauvageot, then acting president of UNEF.* Our discussions on the future of student unionism were heated. The PSU intended to keep control of its tiny apparatus, and we underestimated the financial stakes in the battles around the management of the MNEF.† A few months later, the Marseille congress of UNEF ended, just before Christmas, with a night-time battle over procedure, in the course of which lawyers rescued the outgoing leadership by invalidating the largest local branches for formal administrative faults, the majority of these having swung to the left under the pressure of the movement. In the early hours, our mouths clammy and bruised, we formed up on the precinct of the Saint-Charles campus (including Samuel Johsua, Sami Naïr and Joanny Hocquenghem).‡ We watched the pale December sun rise, ruminating on this object lesson in bureaucratic manoeuvring.

The UNEF was already losing its importance. The Mexican police fired on the demonstrators on Tlatelolco square. Students rose up in Pakistan. Fists in black gloves were raised on the Olympic podium in Mexico City. The planet seemed covered with flames, from which we saw only the light.

History was breathing down our necks.

The time of slow impatience had not yet arrived.

* Marc Heurgon, 1926–2001, history and geography secondary school teacher. Responsible for organisational questions at the PSU national office 1965–68. He, together with Gustave Massiah, was the driving force behind the GOP tendency, which, having grown autonomous within the party, then joined with Révolution! in the OCT in 1976. He wrote a history of the PSU from 1958–62.

Jacques Sauvageot, born 1943, popularly perceived as one of the leaders of the student movement in 1968, alongside Geismar and Cohn-Bendit. Member of the PSU and vice-president and the president of the UNEF until 1972. Subsequently left the PSU and became an art historian.

† This would give rise to a long-running scandal involving a number of French Socialists, culminating in a court case in 1999 which led to the resignation of finance minister Dominique Strauss-Kahn, and a six-month prison sentence (covered by an amnesty) for Jean-Christophe Cambadélis.

‡ Samuel Johsua, leading member of Revolution! and the OCT. Subsequently member of LCR, NPA and now Gauche Anticapitaliste. Based in Marseilles and university professor in education.

Mai, si! (Unfinished Business)

We believe that a revolution is a clear solution, and we know that this too is not exact. These are crude simplifications of things.

— Paul Valéry

Seeking to explain the present by the past, we recognize at the same time how the past is rendered intelligible by the present, and what light it borrows from each new day – something that the writers of textbooks have so far failed to understand. They believed that the history of the revolution had come to an end, and had already pronounced a definitive judgement on men and things.

— Heinrich Heine

Enough harking back on 1968, enough generational effusions, memories of youthful companionship at the finest age of life. Too much has been said, and too much made. A mountain made of what was a wrinkle or a hillock on a sad plain, but not a historic peak launching out on an assault against heaven. We were not born to political action in 68, and we are not hostages of this imaginary birth.¹

Like any authentic event, however, the '68 affair' is still unfinished business. The American scholar Kristin Ross² has recently dismantled the laborious work of 'managing memory' which, in thirty years of celebrations and commemorations, ended up reducing the largest general strike in history to a juvenile prank or a banal 'spring-cleaning'.

This enterprise of bomb disposal found its culmination in the formula of a German sociologist that supposedly 'nothing happened in France in 68'.³ It was only a trompe-l'oeil that masked the authentic event of the Prague Spring. A number of the 'May actors', desirous of justifying their subsequent trajectory, generously contributed to this revision, accompanying and fuelling the liberal reaction of the 1980s with their authorised testimony. As far back as 1977, Gilles

Deleuze had perceived the hatred and rancour of the 'new philosophers' towards 1968 as an irrefutable sign of a rise in the 'usual threshold of stupidity'.⁴

What was involved was indeed an enterprise of depoliticisation and dehistoricisation. Far from opening an unprecedented field of possibilities, the event was reduced to a mere link in a long process of modernisation and cultural *aggiornamento*. Instead of revealing the contradictions of contemporary capitalism, the social explosion was no more than an accelerator making possible 'the accomplishment of its deepest desires': 'By asserting a teleology of the present, the official history erases those memories of past alternatives that sought or envisioned other outcomes than the one that came to pass.'⁵ The temporal rupture is then wiped out in a repetition of similarity. Nothing happened that could have disrupted the immutable order of works and days.

A year after the June days of 1848, which broke in two the course of modern history, Auguste Comte published his *Calendrier positiviste*, or *Calendrier général de commémoration publique*. He ascribed to commemoration the function of 'profoundly developing the sense of continuity in the present generation', in order to 'ensure the proper prevalence of the organic spirit over the critical spirit' and to contribute to 'order and progress' keeping the upper hand over 'subversive utopias': 'When the priest of Humanity will have had his theory of the past widely adopted, he will by that token have taken possession of the future.' Carried away by his normative passion and his concern to conjure away revolutionary tumult, Comte prophesied 'the social advent of the only philosophy [his own] that can complete the Western revolution'. In conformity with this sharp-toothed logic, Rousseau was excluded from the positivist calendar on the grounds of his 'critical spirit'. Blanqui was correct in seeing positivism as no more than 'an execrable doctrine of historical fatalism', according to which 'what comes about is good, by the very fact that it comes about'.⁶

In 1998, the media officiants of the thirtieth anniversary celebration practised positivism without knowing it, outstripping baron Seillière for whom 'the new positivism' was now the adequate apologetic discourse for the new neoliberal order.* These shipwrecked and

* Ernest-Antoine Seillière de Laborde (Baron), born into the pontifical nobility in 1937, one of the heirs of the De Wendel family of forge-masters. Having studied at the École Nationale de l'Administration, he became a leading figure in the Centre National du Patronat Français (later MEDEF – the employers' federation).

repentant 68ers sought to cultivate in their turn the sense of continuity, and to have the snail-like advance of market democracy prevail over yesterday's subversive utopias. In their turn, they believed they could tame the future by appropriating the past. Conjuring away the spectres of May, they sought to enshrine the victory of the organic spirit of capital over the critical spirit of the street, putting an end once and for all to the interminable Western revolution.

With the weight of years, renegacies and compromises, the rebels of yesterday, recycled in chocolate-box pink and pale green, or converted into media abjection, came round to reducing the political event to a banal lover's tiff or a crass narcissistic wound, treating their own young emotions with the tender condescension of ripe and adult age, adultly aged and ripely rancid.

Tarmac had not yet replaced the paving stones when myth already leapt onto the shoulders of history, as early as autumn 1968. There was 'the undiscoverable revolution', an exercise of instant exorcism which Raymond Aron carried out with a certain talent. There was also the cautious and laborious May 'of the proletarians', reviewed by Georges Séguy to pour cold water on the lyric ardour of spring.* There were also, at the opposite extreme, the warlike rodомontades of Alain Geismar and Serge July in their memorable essay *Vers la guerre civile*. Little red book in hand, André Glucksmann celebrated the definitive victory of the 'east wind' over the west wind. It is scarcely surprising that these preachers of the new popular resistance were subsequently scared of their own totalitarian impulses. They wasted no time in metamorphosing into new crusaders of the West, surfing on the actual prevailing wind, the west one of course. Cautiously retired from the scene to await his hour, Mitterrand was content to polish his 'share of truth'.

More soberly, we spoke of a 'dress rehearsal'. That was still exaggerated, no doubt. But certainly less delirious than the lyrical effusions of the future once-new philosophers.

In 1978, the road-sweeper of the Union of the Left had come and gone. 'One sole solution, the Common Programme!', the processions from Nation to Bastille and République had chanted for six years.

* Georges Séguy, born 1927, one of the main organisers of the FTP resistance formation. Arrested and deported to Mauthausen. A member of the PCF from 1942, its central committee from 1954 and its Politburo from 1956 to 1982. Secretary of the CGT train drivers' union and then general secretary of the CGT itself (1967–82), and a member of its executive until 1992.

The logical corollary was 'no more common programme = no more solution'. Mourning for the great hopes, and the burial with scant ceremony of the announced engagement.

The tenth anniversary still provided an occasion for strategic controversy. The dictatorships had fallen in Greece, Portugal and Spain. In France, despite its division, the left had scented victory in the March legislative elections. Rivalling Christian Democracy, the Italian Communist Party reached its electoral apogee in 1976. The Communist parties of southern Europe attempted their Eurocommunist renewal. The coup d'état in Chile was passionately debated, likewise the carnation revolution in Portugal, while the monarchical transition was negotiated in Spain. There was vigorous polemic around popular power, the general strike, self-management, liberated areas and armed struggle. Yet the wind was beginning to change. Thatcher proclaimed that There Is No Alternative and was soon followed by Reagan's America.

In France, the Giscardian right was in power. The pretenders of 68, mutated into virtual councillors of the prince, still champed at the bit in the antechamber, one foot already slipped into the crack of the door. Vexed by the emphasis of a *soixante-huitard* gesture observed at a distance, Régis Debray announced the postmodern celebrations of May: 'The bourgeois republic celebrated its birth in the storming of the Bastille, it will one day celebrate its renaissance in the speeches about 1968.' The movement of contestation would appear in retrospect as a cultural catching up that consisted in 'teaching industrialization manners'.⁷ This movement, according to Debray, contributed to overturning and shattering the collective values that braked the new expansion of capital, 'the two mutually supportive religions of the nation and the proletariat'. After May, and thanks to it, 'the private is eating the public': 'The communion of egos on the barricades has become a generalized egotism, the gift of oneself the cult of oneself, the exaltation of freedoms the consecration of inequalities.' This resentful denigration heralded the reaction against '68 thought',⁸ along the lines of 'It's the fault of 68 and the 68ers!' It also anticipated, with a keen sense of the occasion, the self-justifying reinterpretation of May by those who rallied to victorious Mitterrandism.

The year 1988 saw a change of scenery. May 68 had its twentieth birthday, which was certainly not its finest age. Mitterrand was embarking on a second term. The 68ers had reached their greying and bourgeoisifying forties. Rich and famous at last! In a soap opera

style – ‘love, glory and beauty!’ – Hamon and Rotman’s success story offered this well-endowed generation its *Bildungsroman*. Worker’s blue had gone out of style, social history too. Masses and classes were erased from the souvenir photo. The time had come for court intrigues, the prince and princess charmings of the Mitterrand era.

*Nous l’avions tant aimée . . .*⁹

Or in a narcissistic variant: ‘*Nous nous sommes tant aimés . . .*’

Farewell to both love and arms. Time for Realpolitik!

After ‘imagination to power’, ‘imagination in the right direction’.¹⁰

In the heyday of Reaganite and Thatcherite reaction, the twentieth anniversary ceremonies took on the guise of a battle of memory, dividing a generation that broke down – unequally – between rebels and repentants. The social ladder of the Mitterrand administration had done its work, along with the appetite for power. It was the proper thing now to reduce May 68 to a generational and cultural phenomenon, an uprising of youth against the archaisms of a centralising Jacobin state, the hypocrisies of an outdated moral code, and the rigidity of established social hierarchies. The main virtues of its modernising push were the promotion of individual hedonism, sexual liberation, and an aspiration to decentralisation. In other words, a neoliberal renewal of good old capitalism. Régis Debray could be satisfied with this confirmation of his gloomy prophecies.

On the international level, disenchantment with Third Worldism and its poetic illusions was under way. Pascal Bruckner set out to remove the white man’s guilt.* The new philosophers, after (belatedly) discovering the gulag by way of Solzhenitsyn (having failed to read David Rousset, Ante Ciliga or Victor Serge), ruled the publishing roost. On the ideological screen, the binary opposition between totalitarianism and democracy (without adjective) replaced the class struggle and anti-imperialism. Revolution ‘had to be declared impossible, everywhere and for all time’.¹¹

Then 1998. Thirty years, already . . .

Hello and goodbye.

Without becoming openly scarlet, the air had perceptibly changed. In France, certainly, with the banners and braziers of winter 1995. In Europe more widely, with the Euro-march of unemployed in

* Pascal Bruckner, born 1948, French writer, was close to Maoism, later known as one of the ‘new philosophers’, reactionary critic of so-called ‘Western masochism’.

Amsterdam in 1997. After Euro-markets, Euro-currencies and Euro-money came the time of Euro-strikes, Euro-marches, Euro-revolts and the Euro-demonstrations in Nice (2000), Genoa (2001) and Florence (2002). From 1999 on, the Seattle mobilisation against the World Trade Organization gave a new impetus to movements of resistance against neoliberal globalisation.

In a book published for the thirtieth anniversary, Henri Weber, converted back in 1986 to Fabius-style socialism, characterised 'the events' of May by their international dimension, their chiefly generational dynamic ('its motive force was not a social class but an age class'), and their 'democratic and libertarian' aim.¹² This triptych hardly makes it possible to understand what it was that made the 'events' (in the plural) of the French May a singular event of international significance. The characteristics referred to here were in fact common to all the major student movements of the sixties, from the United States to Germany, by way of Mexico, Japan, Poland and Pakistan. The 'modernization of manners' was part of a weighty tendency that ended up prevailing everywhere from Social-Democratic Sweden to the post-Franco *movida* in Spain, without such a song and dance being made of it.

The angle from which the event is viewed determined the balance sheet that people sought to draw thirty years later. For Weber, it was 'largely positive': 'In the mid 70s, French society became far more liberal, more democratic, more hedonistic, more solidaristic, and more egalitarian.' The liberal turn had been taken. Yet far from reinforcing solidarity and equality, it would methodically annihilate them, a process in which François Mitterrand's two terms played their part. Weber deplored, on the other hand, 'the new flare-up of revolutionary culture and principled anti-capitalism' after the strikes of winter 1995, as well as 'the revival of class-struggle ideology' and 'the rigidities introduced into the economy' by social achievements! Positive here is what favours the accession of the middle classes into the ruling elite, and negative the 'rigidities' that obstruct the performance of liberalised capitalism. A socially typecast judgement.

Kristin Ross rejects the two competing discourses that each seek to politically neutralise May 68. On the one hand, the 'biographic confiscation' that reduces the event to a 'generational drama', all the better to spirit away the spectre of class struggle in favour of a recurrent generational conflict. As the saying goes, youth has to pass.¹³ This three-card trick makes it possible at one stroke to set up the media

spokespeople of the generation as authorised interpreters of the 1960s: by dint of an implacable biological law of ageing, which supposedly involves a necessary advance in the order of wisdom and reason, the untamed bohemians mutate into comfortable *bobos*^{*} and cynical parvenus. Order can then reign, in the best of all capitalist worlds.

The other form in which the event is neutralised is 'sociological anaesthesia'. This recuperation with its scholarly pretensions dissolves the singularity of the event into weighty tendencies, effective in the *longue durée* and statistically quantifiable. It repeats on a lesser scale the political obliteration inflicted on the French Revolution on the occasion of its bicentennial. Whilst a process of unavoidable modernisation was under way, an accident (the bad advice showered on Louis Capet in 1789, or the clumsiness of the police in 1968) led the situation to get out of hand, opening a troublesome parenthesis, before history regained its normal course and progress went ahead again. This theory of skidding off course or deviation¹⁴ spirits away the bifurcation of the event, dissolving the plurality of possibilities into the fatality of the *fait accompli*.¹⁵ After an unfortunate detour or a regrettable misunderstanding, the great river of history calmly regains its bed.

Not content with banalising the event, these discourses ascribe it the responsibility for the accumulated 'archaisms' and 'delays' of society. Going against the force of things, the French Revolution supposedly created a country of small rural proprietors, with its hundreds of cheeses and wines, delaying a liberating urbanisation and industrialisation. In the same way, May 68 supposedly reinforced 'social rigidities' (read: social rights that had been won) and obstructed a liberal reform that was naturally inscribed in the meaning of history. While Marx has often been unjustly accused of economic determinism, this kind of historic and technological determinism forms the underlying framework of neoliberal rhetoric.

This ideological re-reading of May was part of the 'cultural turn' effected in the intellectual field in the late 1970s. Under a reflux effect, 'artistic criticism' broke away from 'social criticism'.¹⁶ In the 1960s, on the other hand, the demand for social justice and the critique of alienation went hand in hand.

In May 1998, a trendy magazine, *Technikart*, published an anniversary issue under a pejorative cover: 'Was May 68 rubbish?'

* A shorthand for '*bourgeois bohémien*', akin to the 'hipster'.

Investigation of a French myth'. The whole issue illustrated this liberal-libertarian depoliticisation, unadorned and as flatly and clearly as possible: 'May 68 was not political but cultural. It was not revolutionary but contestationary, not utopian but hedonistic. May 68 was not the 70s, it was the 90s. May 68 did not even happen in May, but rather in March' (i.e. at the university of Nanterre).

Exit the general strike. Return to the starting point of the 'student commune' and its stars.

May 68 versus March 68? Old-fashioned workers versus modern students? The proletarian counter-revolution versus the youth revolution? Serge July, turning his back on his youthful emotions and his 'obsession to connect with the working class', rightly received the warm congratulations of the technologically savvy. The strike was airbrushed out – too heavy, too worthy, not light and fun enough. The techno-trendy conclusion: 'They are trying to make us swallow a political 68 that bores us; ours was social and cultural, that of the 22 March.'

This opposition between the archaic heaviness of the social and the unsustainable lightness of culture was clearly apparent in 1997, when Jacques Julliard and Romain Goupil opposed the 'societal' to the social, the vivid Hollywood colours of the movement against the Pasqua laws to the outmoded sepia of strike pickets, the triumphant modernity of the image creators to the confined and corporative conservatism of the railwaymen.*

The peroration of the new oldies of *Technikart*:

Be a happy traitor or a poor bloke without a penny, that's the exciting alternative that the 68 generation left us with. [. . .] The 90s have put a revolutionary programme into action: reappropriate your own life. An underground and silent insurrection that – to the despair of old fogeys and decadent romantics – has no need for any barricades. The logic of rupture, the clean slate that so excited the Leninist revolutionaries of May 68, has given way to an imaginary of alliance. No longer to replace a world and its bosses by another one, but on the contrary, accept the one that has been handed down to us and live in it to best advantage.

* Jacques Julliard, born 1933, historian and journalist. Active in opposition to the war in Algeria and in the CFDT union's education section, which he represented at the Sorbonne during May 68. In the Parti Socialiste from 1974, and a columnist for the *Nouvel Observateur* from 1978 to 2010. Author of an important study of revolutionary syndicalism but now a very moderate, mainstream centre-left editorialist.

After the Mitterrand generation, the cocoon generation. After renegeation, resignation to the immutable order of things. Tomorrow, the (guard) dogs! And each person in their niche.

A sorry age.

If it had been no more than a student fever, May 68 would have occupied only a modest place in the annals of campus revolts, numerous as they were in that year. Nothing would have justified its lasting international radiance and its universal symbolic significance. The liberalisation of manners, the right to contraception and abortion, individualism without individuality, have all come to prevail in all developed societies, at an interval of a few years.

If ink still flows on the French singularity of May 68, this is largely due to the international context: the simultaneity of the Prague spring, the Têt offensive in Vietnam, and the student uprisings in Mexico and Pakistan.

And above all, the most powerful general strike of the twentieth century. Under the paving stones, the strike! The last in a cycle, the epilogue to the working-class epic of the nineteenth century, its last bow, the final somersault of a world on the point of disappearing, symbolised by an elderly philosopher standing on a barrel in front of the working-class fortress of Billancourt? Or rather the first civic strike in a new cycle, a mass uprising against commodity reification, in an urbanised country where wage-earners make up more than 80 per cent of the active population, a generalised social uprising that prefigured the struggles of the twenty-first century? There is probably something of both: of the new in the process of birth, and the old that was still dying.

A general eruption, between no more and not yet.

It is to Kristin Ross's credit that she situates the brief sequence of May (between the student explosion on the 3rd and de Gaulle's speech on the 30th announcing a general election) in its conditions of time and space. She recalls the connection between the radicalisation of 68, the Algerian war and decolonisation. She stresses the role of the publisher Maspero, and the influence of the books of Fanon, Sartre and Nizan. She brings in the international context: the death of Che, the Cuban revolution, the war in Indochina, the Cultural Revolution in China. This context puts the event in relief. It makes it a moment in the crystallisation of possibilities and gives it its true political significance.

It was a rare moment, with the combined effects of the dismantling of colonial empires, a massive rebellion of labour against capital (in

France and Italy, and especially in Argentina), the wars of liberation (Vietnam, the Portuguese colonies) and mass movements for political independence (Czechoslovakia), the democratic mobilisations of youth on every continent, the rise of anti-racist and anti-war movements in the United States itself. Certainly, this bundle of phenomena was not enough to present a serious threat to the very heart of the system. Certainly, it was still a matter of ruptures on the margin(s). Certainly, the year 68 reached a provisional *dénouement* in the symbolic reaffirmation of the Yalta division: Lyndon Johnson withdrawing to his ranch while Soviet tanks crushed the Prague spring, and Leonid Brezhnev turning his back on the Paris uprising to lounge in his dacha. In China, too, the Thermidorean turn was under way.

But no matter. The days of spring sunshine and fleeting myth had returned, that 'very old yet very modern illusion', that 'star of all renaissances', of which the Peruvian revolutionary José Carlos Mariátegui spoke in an essay of the 1920s, precisely titled 'The Final Struggle': 'The messianic millennium will never come. For the human being arrives only to start out again. But he cannot help believing that this new journey will be his last. No revolution can foresee its successor, even if it already bears the seed of it in its entrails.'

The post-68er golden legend of the 1980s and 90s, on the contrary, set out to dissolve the figure of the worker (and to a lesser degree, that of the anti-colonial militant), in favour of the student leader. In their book published in the early 1990s, Hamon and Rotman accordingly proposed an anecdotal and biographical history, in which prominent figures play the leading role. This ahistorical historiography simply dismisses what Adolfo Gilly calls 'the politics of the people', or the politics of the oppressed.¹⁷

If Kristin Ross's critique is scathing, the repoliticisation to which she looks forward scarcely goes beyond debatable generalities. Thus the political meaning of 68 lies chiefly in 'the encounter with the colonized', the deconstruction of social identities, the 'opening to otherness'. Ross never tackles the situation from the standpoint of strategies, the actual balance of forces, debates of orientation about the general strike and its outcome. The disdain for sociological work, certainly insufficient but none the less necessary, plays her a bad trick

* See José Carlos Mariátegui: *An Anthology*, translated and edited by Harry E. Vanden and Marc Becker (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2011).

here. Proudly ignorant of a number of detailed investigations, she fuels her thesis with fragmentary testimonies that are often superficial, and ends up giving a crippled image of reality. The ideological critique of ideological discourse, then, no longer manages to re-establish the political dimension of the affair.

If the activity of a new radical left heralded a number of changes at work in the long term, the 68 political scene remained largely dominated by organisations of the traditional left, in particularly the PCF. It is not enough to note that the conquests of the general strike were still below those of 1936 or 1945, and relatively limited in relation to the unprecedented scale of the mobilisation. The compromises accepted by the trade-union leaderships at the Grenelle negotiations, their proclaimed desire not to expand the dynamic of demands to political confrontation, bear a large responsibility for this. The question remains as to why these results, far from negligible but well below what was possible, did not provoke more substantial cracks in the majority unions and parties. Nothing comparable happened, proportionately, to the crisis provoked by the Renault strikes of 1947.*

Instead of giving the strategic question of power its full importance, Kristin Ross sees this on the contrary as a sign of reflux: it only appeared, supposedly, when the initial élan fell away and the event turned to ashes. Dismissing equally Raymond Aron and Pierre Goldmann (who saw the absence of armed confrontation as illustrating the limits inherent to the concrete conjuncture), Ross maintains that 'the real question lay elsewhere, outside the parameters of a revolution, whether possible or not: why did something happen rather than nothing?' The theme of the struggle for power, or for a change of government, would thus have remained in sway to a 'narrative determined by the logic of the state'. The representation of an opposition between a Lenin and a Rosa Luxemburg both equally imaginary does not go beyond familiar clichés and platitudes.¹⁸ Ross's account, though subtle in terms of deciphering cultural symptoms, thus ends up opposing one mode of depoliticisation to another, reducing the strategic question of May to a failed encounter between workers and students.

* Renault strike of 1947: The second great strike after the Liberation of France (following that of the postworkers), taking place in the biggest factory in France and with the left (including the PCF) in government. Began on the initiative of the Trotskyist Union Communiste Internationaliste, from which emerged, after 1956, the cadre of *Voix Ouvrière*, later known as *Lutte Ouvrière*.

Ross slips from the legitimate rehabilitation of the event to its fetishised hypostatis, borrowing from Alain Badiou the magic formula that 'something that happens by excess, beyond all calculation'.¹⁹ This theological inversion, which eternises the moment of the miracle instead of seeking in it a modest fragment of eternity, scarcely paves the way to understanding the trajectory of the different political currents, through the 1970s and beyond. As if politics, reduced to its critical aspect, had to disappear along with this.

The problem is not to try to commemorate May 68 differently, but rather to accept that there was not a unique 'May spirit', but spirits in the plural, their May and ours, which is opposed both to its liberal confiscation and to its regressive denigration.

Whether liberal or social-liberal, the 'memory management' of 68 is all the more readily abandoned to nostalgic and narcissistic effusions if it still rejoices in this 'pretend revolution' that supposedly 'cured us of waiting for the great day' by preparing the advent of a 'managerial and consensual left'.

Symmetrically, republican restoration à la Finkielkraut makes 68 responsible for the loosening of morals and the ebb of social cohesion.[†] 'What has become of us? Yes, what has become of France thirty years after May 68?', the future neo-*chiracuien* Alexandre Adler asked on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary.²⁰ The 'difficulties of 68 in founding a family', and the 'distant roots' of the present problems, go back, according to Adler, to the defeat of Gaullism. He opposes the liberal myth of a hedonistic and individualist post-68 with the Gaullist anti-myth of a one and indivisible Resistance. The response to this brief explanation is equally simple: salvation by a republican *union sacrée*, authoritarian and security-oriented. For want of a Pasqua-Chevènement team, walking arm in arm up the Champs-Élysées with the ghosts of Malraux and Michel Debré, the ex-Stalinist turncoat has been converted to the law and order rhetoric of Sarkozy.[‡]

* Bernard Guetta, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 23 April 1998.

† Alain Finkielkraut, born 1949, reactionary essayist and public intellectual. Author of more than thirty works. Professor of philosophy and the history of ideas at the Paris École Polytechnique.

‡ Michel Debré, 1912–96, in the postwar Union démocratique et socialiste de la Résistance, along with Mitterrand, he passed over to the Parti Radical and then the Gaullist RPF. In 1958, one of the authors of the Constitution of the Fifth Republic. Prime minister 1959–62. Disagreed with de Gaulle's policy on Algeria. An MP for Réunion, he was a minister on various occasions up until 1973. In 1980 he scored just 1.66 per cent in the presidential election.

‘If the lucky generations’, Henri Weber concludes, ‘are those that realized some of the ideals of their youth, then the 1968 generation does not have much cause for complaint.’²¹ This smug self-satisfaction echoes the globalised beatitudes of Alain Minc and the perpetual euphoria of Bruckner. The same kind of refrain generally accompanies these reversals of allegiance: it’s not us who’ve changed, it’s life, it’s the air, the spirit of the time . . .

Life and the air easily take the blame.

We wanted a world in which the right to existence prevailed over the right to property, popular power over commodity dictatorship, the logic of needs over that of profits, public good over private egoism. Social-liberalism in power, under Fabius, Rocard, Bérégovoy and Jospin, worked strictly in the opposite direction. We shouted: ‘To hell with borders!’ and ‘We are all German Jews!’ And the left in government hunted down undocumented immigrants. Their liberal Europe is dotted with new ‘holding centres’ and detention camps. We rejoiced to see the Bourse in a blaze of fireworks, and the recycled 68-ers now fit their moods to the stock-exchange index.

‘The agnostics and sceptics, the moderate and the cautious, those with foresight and prudence, undoubtedly said and did less in the way of stupidities, above all because they simply did less,’ Weber nostalgically sighs. The moderate and cautious, those with foresight and prudence today, are precisely our rulers and managers, our arrivistes and parvenus (but in what shape!). Well-behaved young people. Their utopia of the lesser evil is not the least of utopias.

But this is just a beginning. The important is what follows. And the end, of course, which never does end.

Thinking the Crisis

In the history of the world, one event is not always directly the result of another; events rather influence one another intermittently.

– Heinrich Heine, 'Religion and Philosophy in Germany'

All human history, as far as it is manifest in thought, will perhaps have been no more than the effect of a kind of crisis.

– Paul Valéry, *Variétés I*

I am not interested in what doesn't move, I'm interested in the event. The event has scarcely been a philosophical concept.

– Michel Foucault

In the peaceful somnolence of a provincial *préparatoire* class, Louis Althusser's *For Marx* landed in 1965 like a meteor from a distant planet. Reading this seemed to raise our confused activity to conceptual heights. The sober gravity of the grey dust jacket already promised unsuspected treasures. Opening to us the discovery of a 'history continent', a new science invited us on a journey to unexplored archipelagos. We were perplexed, however, by the idea that this noble knowledge was not more historical than knowledge of sugar is sweet. Didn't this reduction of the motley of history to the immutable order of structures risk making revolution unthinkable, if not improbable?¹

The time was no doubt ripe for these great structural coherences. The *khâgnes* were passionate about Saussurean linguistics and the elementary structures of kinship. At the far extreme from the evanescent figures of modernity, the stable and solid seemed the only material worthy of genuinely scientific knowledge. But misunderstanding set in from the start between Althusser and ourselves. We suspected

his militant anti-historicism of building a conceptual paradise purged of all historicity. His disdain for flesh-and-blood history enabled him to avoid a serious balance sheet of the Stalin period. His article on 'student problems', which stood completely on the side of the bureaucratic order in the conflict that opposed us to the Party apparatus, could only reinforce our distrust.²

Our difference was indeed a political one. We were not waging the same quarrel vis-à-vis the Party. Resolutely anti-Stalinist, convinced that the Soviet Union had undergone a bureaucratic counter-revolution a long time ago, we no longer believed in the possibility of a calm auto-reform. No more did we have illusions as to the capacities of the PCF for regeneration. The rupture was therefore inevitable.

Althusser's thought served as a backup for the Maoist dogmatism being born in the cloister of the rue d'Ulm. We sought elsewhere the weapons that would help us resist this east wind. Our heterodoxy used whatever materials were available: the lectures of Gérard Granel at Toulouse, the psychiatric experiments of Tosquelles and Guattari, the translations of Marcuse and the pirated ones of Wilhelm Reich,³ the essays of Lucien Goldmann. We drew disparate arguments from these against the ravages of a positivist and authoritarian Marxism. Daniel Guérin's essay on popular movements in the French Revolution furnished us with an antidote to the Jacobin orthodoxy dominant in Communist historiography, from Mathiez to Soboul. Although Henri Lefebvre's prolixity might appear suspiciously diletante in relation to Althusserian asceticism, his curiosity about everything around encouraged us to depart from the beaten (and re-beaten) tracks. On the margin of French theoretical provincialism and at a distance from Western philosophical Marxism, Ernest Mandel initiated us to the critique of political economy and led us to discover an open, cosmopolitan and militant Marxism, unrecognised in France.

At a time when history seemed in suspense, after the great turbulence of the Resistance and the Algerian war, the structuralist rhetoric was hegemonic in intellectual milieus. Under cover of an 'epistemological break', the claim of doing science conferred on the masters of theory an elevated social status, at the same time as awarding them academic respectability. In this way, the apprentice red mandarins could reconcile a noisily proclaimed subversive project with the positivist heritage dominant in the French universities.

Henri Lefebvre denounced (which took a certain chutzpah at that time) this 'structuralist ideology' as 'an ideology of power' and 'the

birth of an ideology in the guise of struggle against ideology'.⁴ The formalism of the vacuum produced an impoverished vision of the real, to the detriment of the possible. If a theory is 'a gymnastics of the possible', then a fetishised reality, amputated of its possibilities, imposes codes that are digested uncritically. It tends to justify the established bureaucratic order, whether in Moscow, Beijing, or within the PCF. It leaves little place indeed for disorder and crisis.

A glacial Marxism, without style or passion, reduced to a scientific objectivism without critical subversion, gradually shrunk to a skeleton to be fleshed out in the livery of new dogmatisms. The inertia of structures ended up legitimising strange compromises between an intransigent radicalism of theory and a resigned realism in practice. Touched by Maoist grace, good pupils could best reconcile in this way an anti-hierarchical generational revolt with a solid appetite for power and social ascent. French Maoism did not take long to perish from this contradiction.

Opposed to the obscure impurities of ideology, the luminous purity of science actually led to a programme of depoliticisation. 'The aim of de-dramatization,' Lefebvre noted, was to protect oneself from the tumults of the time. The order of capitalist reproduction and its bureaucratic double then seemed to impose themselves as the new 'unsurpassable horizon of our time'. History, however, ended up rebuffing them, whether this was proved by 1968, or by 11 September.

Joining the ENS sanctuary at Saint-Cloud in October 1966 meant plunging into a curious broth of culture. The east wind of the 'Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution' was blowing in gusts. The Great Helmsman held a steady course in the storm. His 'red sun' lit up the radiant foreheads of his *normalien* disciples. They only lacked the Little Red Book, until it arrived by the truckload in autumn 1966. The esprit de corps typical of the monastic retreat of the Écoles Normales was propitious for the spread of this new liturgy.

Caught up in the whirlwind of currents, tendencies and factions, I failed to take advantage of the opportunity offered by the jovial intelligence of Touki Desanti, the austere competence of Alexis Philonenko, the seminars of Pontalis and Nicolas Ruwet.* After

* Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, 1924–2013, became a political collaborator of Merleau-Ponty and Sartre when a student, and was a long-time member of the *Les Temps Modernes* editorial team. A psychoanalyst, in 1970 he was among the founders of the *Nouvelle revue de psychanalyse*.

Nicolas Ruwet, 1933–2001, Belgian-born linguist, literary critic and musicologist. Wrote on generative grammar.

completing my *licence* in the autumn 1967 term, I geared myself to the dissertation for my *maîtrise* on 'Lenin's notion of revolutionary crisis'. The title was not very academic. At the time, however, it did not appear philosophically incorrect, at least not at Nanterre. Lefebvre himself had published a book (unjustly forgotten) on Lenin's thought, and Althusser had just delivered at the Sorbonne his iconoclastic lecture on 'Lenin and Philosophy'. Lenin was all the rage.

The subject proved explosively topical. On re-reading my dissertation, completed with undue haste in September 1968, right after finishing the manuscript of *Mai 68, répétition générale*, the choice seemed to reveal the questions of the day. How to escape the morbid eternity of structures? How to extract ourselves from the voluptuous folds of the *longue durée*? How to break through the vicious circle of infernal repetition? How to glimpse the open door through which a smiling spectre or an untimely messiah might one day arrive?

The notion of 'crisis' denotes something that makes a hole, a breakdown of the prevailing order, discontinuity and rupture. Yet it maintains the historic situation that distinguishes the event from the religious miracle. In this way it establishes a distance between the sacred and profane politics. As for Lenin, he gave his name to the eruption of a historical subjectivity: the oppressed class in struggle, or the Leninist party as the form finally discovered for revolutionary subjectivity. Fed on a reading of *History and Class Consciousness*, we responded to the tyranny of impersonal structure by a subjectivisation (going as far as a characteristically ultra-left voluntarism). To the scientific coldness of ventriloquous structures, by way of the gushing speech of 'groups-in-fusion'.

On the search for this creative subjectivity, I drew wholesale on psychoanalysis, epistemology and linguistics – debatable analogies, comparing the relationship between history and event in the way that Bachelard combined wave and particle. The Freudian topology of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* served as an argument against the dialectic of the in-itself and the for-itself, according to which the full 'for-itself' consciousness of the party emerged from the unconscious depths of the 'in-itself' class. For good measure, I borrowed the Freudian formula popularised by Lacan, '*Wo es war, da soll ich werden*',⁵ to describe the movement of self-transformation or self-emancipation leading the alienated proletariat towards its own truth. The party was thus distinguished both from the Id boiling with impulses and from the Ego with its tyrannical censorship. It was

identified with the effort through which the proletariat, taking consciousness of its latent class being, tore itself away from an ectoplasmic immediacy.⁶

But the fashion was above all one of linguistic references. Greimas proposed viewing the transformations of language as the result of the action of rhythm on structure, or of speech on language, thus opening the possibility of diachronic breaches in synchronic immobility. Revolutionary politics also became a question of rhythms and arrhythmias.

These attempts to articulate the event to the structure still presupposed the hypothetical mediation of an ungraspable subject. Time itself tended in this way to become a kind of secular god, or subjectivity without subject, the providential agent of any metamorphosis, which laughingly pulled the strings of the historical puppet. Faced with this difficulty, I sought support from Gustave Guillaume, who saw the present as 'the image by which a bit of the future is constantly resolved into a bit of the past'.⁷ I drew from this the adventurous conclusion that the revolutionary crisis is also, in its way, the form in which the double determination of past and future is resolved in the present.

On the political dimension of the crisis, the dissertation took as its starting-point the classic definitions of Lenin in 'The Collapse of the Second International', and of Trotsky in his *History of the Russian Revolution*. The former stresses the interaction between several elements in a crisis situation: when the ruling classes can no longer maintain their rule, those at the bottom no longer tolerate this, and this double impossibility is expressed in the entry of the masses onto the political stage. When Trotsky cites these descriptive criteria, he emphasised their 'conditional reciprocity'.⁸ The ultimate condition for a crisis, which unites its elements in a propitious conjuncture, is then the intervention of a vanguard united by a common strategic will. Lenin makes this the distinctive feature between a simple revolutionary situation and a revolutionary crisis susceptible of being brought to a victorious conclusion:

It is not every revolutionary situation that gives rise to a revolution; revolution arises only out of a situation in which the above-mentioned objective changes are accompanied by a subjective change, namely, the ability of the revolutionary class to take revolutionary mass action strong enough to break (or dislocate) the old

government, which never, not even in a period of crisis, 'falls', if it is not toppled over.

This ability is asserted through a process, in the course of which the power of the ruled is increased by a reciprocal weakening of their enemies. The crisis, then, is only conceivable from the standpoint of the subject capable of resolving it. It is still necessary to determine in what way, precisely, the crisis is such.⁹

A dispositive thus takes shape that combines the category of the present, as the specific time of political action, and the representation of the crisis, as the nub of clashing temporalities. It is from this relationship that the possibility of the structure being overthrown arises as an event. This reading of Lenin, undoubtedly somewhat strained, was strongly influenced by that of Lukács. Maintaining that so-called economic crises ultimately perform a function of regulation and make it possible to correct the recurring disequilibria in the cycle of accumulation, Lukács held that 'only the consciousness of the proletariat can open an issue to the crisis of capitalism'. The difference between the crisis that makes such a decision, and regulatory crises, does not lie in its particular extension or depth, not even in a transformation of quantity into quality, but rather in that the proletariat ceases to be the subaltern object and actively deploys the antagonism inscribed at the heart of capitalist production. Only when its rebelling subjectivity rises up against the petrified objectivity of capital and the state, can the crisis effectively become revolutionary.

Breaking with a 'timeless socialism', dominant in the reformist workers' movement, this accentuating of the subjective side of things undoubtedly favoured an excessive passion of will and certain ultra-left impulses in the period after 1968. But it at least had the merit of shaking the chains of structural fatality and interpellating each person's responsibility.

I was scarcely aware, on the other hand, of the trap that this negative dialectic of the subject risked leading into, ending up with a disconcerting game of hide-and-seek between, on the one hand, a theoretical subject that was both absent and abstract (a virtual proletariat inscribed in the formal structure of the mode of production), and, on the other hand, the practical subject of a vanguard representing the proletariat 'for-itself', finally conscious of the meaning of history and of its own role in this profane theodicy. This 'for-itself' might be framed by cautious quotation marks, but it still tended to

make the party the equivalent for the Hegelian absolute spirit, protected from the ebb and flow of 'class consciousness'.¹⁰

This reading of Lukács, however, certainly formed the theoretical basis of our political voluntarism, galvanised by the still active illumination of the event. The notion of revolutionary crisis thus made it possible to reconcile, in a kind of historical epiphany, the practical subject and its theoretical phantom. In the rift of a propitious movement, body and spirit would join and fuse: the virtual subject, invested with a strategic potential, and the political subject that actualises it. The notion of a strategic project thus became the nexus that tied together the notions of crisis, of the present, and of the party, as specific categories of politics. Class struggle, in fact, could not be reduced to a combinatory of social relations and functions. It had to be conceived as a permanent strategic confrontation.

Several years later, certain pages of Foucault reinforced this intuition:

Sociologists constantly revive a debate that has no end, as to what is a class and who belongs to it. Until now, however, no one has examined or deepened the question of knowing what struggle is. What I would like to discuss, starting from Marx, is not the problem of the sociology of classes, but that of strategic method concerning struggle.¹¹

It would be impossible to express better what was our constant preoccupation, even before 1968: to conceive strategically, rather than sociologically, the formation of antagonistic social relations; to conceive the class struggle not as ultimate foundation of the play of power, but as the condition for the confrontation of strategies. It was still necessary to free this strategic thought from classic representations of the subject as actor and master of its acts, as well as from their consequences.¹²

The Althusserian formula defining history as 'a process without subject or end' seemed to drown revolutionary subjectivity in an objectivist fatalism. But we were not (yet) ready to draw the full consequences of a notion of strategy articulated to a historical process without judge or Last Judgement. Undoubtedly the polemical context in the aftermath of 68 was an obstacle to this. Following the election of a solidly Gaullist legislature, revolutionary militants, thrown from enthusiasm to disappointment, found it very hard to

accept that the crisis had been patched over and order re-established. If this had really been just a beginning, the battle had to continue.¹³ The outbreak of the general strike, suddenly breaking the iron circle of everyday alienations, the experience of the routine cowardice of the party and union apparatuses, the contrast between the creativity of the street and the inertia of electoral representation – all seemed to encourage the quest for a redemptive popular spontaneity.

The more educated sought theoretical backing for this primacy of movement over organisation, spontaneity over consciousness, in Rosa Luxemburg. In Italy, Rossana Rossanda celebrated the regenerative virtues of the social movement, maintaining that the centre of gravity of struggle had shifted 'from political forces to social ones'. When the paths of political transformation seemed closed, this formula necessarily had its share of truth: by default, the issue now seemed on the side of the social. This opposition between the social and the political was rediscovered after 1995, implicitly coinciding with that between purity (of the social) and impurities (of politics). One fetishism thus drove out another: the 'illusion of the social' replaced what Marx had called the 'political illusion', without however managing to go beyond their formal antimony.

In his *History of Bolshevism*, republished in 1967, Arthur Rosenberg put forward a general theory of consciousness, according to which the principles of organisation are directly a function of the sociological state and historical development of the proletariat.¹⁴ The distinction between party and class, central in Lenin's *What Is to Be Done?*, then appears as the expression of a still embryonic development of modern classes. That would be why intellectual circles and conspiratorial groups still played a pioneering role at the start of the twentieth century. To the extent that commodity relations develop, however, and capital extends its impersonal domination, the growth and concentration of the wage-earners produces an adequate class consciousness. This socio-historical determinism opposes strategic uncertainties with the calm certainty of an organic evolution. Targeting the bureaucratic conservatism of the German Social-Democratic apparatus, Rosa Luxemburg developed a dialectic of consciousness, according to which the alienated proletariat arrives at the fulfilment of its concept by way of its own historical experience. Every defeat, every mistake, then becomes a necessary moment in a trajectory of initiation. Luxemburg concluded from this, against the claim of the party and its leaders to direct, that 'the only subject to

whom this role of controller now falls is the *mass ego* of the working class that everywhere insists on making its own mistakes'. She hereby asserted an unshakeable faith in 'a growing strengthening of class consciousness' and in a socialist movement that was simply 'the movement of the working class itself', taking up the idea, widespread in the early twentieth century (even before the spread of Freudian theories), that the party was the conscious interpreter of an unconscious process.

As opposed to Lenin, for whom there is no spontaneous identity between the political and the social, the party and the class, for Rosa Luxemburg organisation is an almost organic product of struggle. The party can then be satisfied, as a good pedagogue, with making explicit this 'movement of the working class itself'. Despite belabouring the 'methodical inaction' of the Social-Democratic apparatus of her time, she thus verges on a mechanical interpretation of the path from unconscious to conscious. It is the 'vulgar Luxemburgism' of her epigones that Lukács had in mind in his little book on Lenin, writing that it is a 'totally unhistorical illusion' to believe that 'a correct proletarian class-consciousness ... can gradually develop on its own, without both frictions and setbacks, *as though the proletariat could gradually evolve ideologically into the revolutionary vocation appropriate to its class*.'¹⁵ As a thinker of crisis, Lukács conversely granted too little importance to the uneven development of forms of consciousness and organization.¹⁶

Criticising the 'disorganising' confusion between party and class, Lenin was indeed one of the first to conceive the specificity of the political field as a play of forces and transfigured social antagonisms, translated into a specific language, full of shifts, condensations and revelatory lapses. Pursuing this analogy, one might see a party in the role of an analyst listening to the social, whose dreams and nightmares it interprets. Conceived not in the mode of reflection, but that of transposition, this relationship between the political and the social determines the possibility of alliances and founds the very notion of hegemony.

The revolutionary crisis then appears as the truth-operator of an event, which is heard but not expressed.

A famous text of Lacan, first published in the *Cahiers pour l'analyse* and reprinted in the first volume of *Écrits*, presented the object of science as the subject 'in internal exclusion from the object'. This had a great resonance in the university village. It represented the

relationship between science and knowledge by way of the Borromean knot whose surfaces interpenetrate. This image caused uproar. Theory, accordingly, did not speak truth about the true, but the truth of possibles spoke by way of theory to those who were able to hear it. For the society, the class, or the party, the crisis could be conceived, strictly speaking, as the 'hour of truth': 'The important thing about times of crisis is that they reveal what had previously been latent, reject what is secondary, and display the real wellsprings of class struggle as this actually develops.'¹⁷ Politics is revealed here as algebra rather than arithmetic. Its language cannot be reduced to immediate social determinants, as presupposed by the notions of reflection and superstructure. Its 'necessity' is of a different order, 'far more complex' than that of demands directly deducible from the relation of exploitation. For, contrary to what is imagined by the mechanical Marxists whom Lenin targeted, politics 'does not docilely follow economics'. And its strategic objectives cannot be directly deduced from economic struggles.

This original idea of politics pervades Lenin's thought from start to finish, from the early polemics against the populists, or the 'legal Marxism' of Struve, to those of 1921 against the corporatism of the Workers' Opposition. From 1968 on, it served us as the plumb line against Maoist neo-populism and the diverse variants of *ouvriérisme*. It determined our understanding of the specific role that the student movement could play in a particular conjuncture. The division into classes, Lenin wrote on the subject of student struggles in Russia, is certainly 'the deepest foundation of political groupings', which 'at the end of the day determines these groupings, but this end of the day is established by political struggle alone'.¹⁸ Politics, accordingly, is not the reflection of the social. It is a transposition of it, in the specific syntax and grammar of a global conflict.

Crisis thus appears as the moment of rupture at which theory can be transformed into a strategic art.¹⁹ From this, Lenin deduced the necessity for revolutionaries to be prepared for the impromptu of the event, in which the hidden reality of social relations is unveiled. Since 'we do not and cannot know which spark [. . .] will kindle the conflagration, in the sense of raising up the masses', we must 'set to work to stir up all and sundry, even the oldest, mustiest and seemingly hopeless spheres'. For 'communism is emerging in positively every sphere of public life; its beginnings are to be seen literally on all sides. [. . .]

If special efforts are made to block one of the channels, the “contagion” will find another one, sometimes very unexpectedly.’²⁰

Stir up all spheres! Look for the most unexpected channels!

Against the false humility of a populism devoted to ‘serving the people’, this then was our own golden rule. Thirty years later, in the context of neoliberal reaction and restoration, the controversy over philosophies of resistance and the event leads us back to the same questions around the notion of strategic crisis, between history and event, and on the singularity of politics. If, as Foucault deplored, the event has hardly been worked on as a philosophical category, this is precisely because it is a strategic concept.

When History Breathed Down Our Necks

In the trial of the past before the future, contemporary memoirs are testimony, history is the judge, and the verdict is almost always iniquitous, whether owing to the falseness of depositions, or their absence, or the ignorance of the court. Fortunately, it is open to appeal, and the light of new centuries, projected from afar on centuries past, denounces this judgement of the shadows.

– Auguste Blanqui

One must be modest enough to tell oneself that the moment in which one lives is not the unique, fundamental or eruptive moment of history, on the basis of which everything reaches a culmination or begins again.

– Michel Foucault, 1983

For Michel Foucault, ‘the urgency of posing the question of the subject differently’ was the point at which such authors as Althusser, Lacan and himself converged, all charged with ‘structuralism’ despite their denials. According to Foucault, what mattered was to challenge the supremacy of the sovereign subject that then reigned over European philosophy by way of phenomenology or existentialism.

With the general strike, this subject repressed by structure resurfaced and suddenly proved its strength. In a spectacular reversal, interest turned once more to the ungraspable fluxes of a desiring subjectivity. Foucault, a great deconstructor of the classic subject, set out to explore the manner in which the subject is constituted by way of its resistances to ‘practices of subjugation’.¹

After a century of defeats and betrayals, the defeated would finally have the right to revenge and reparations:

Things really are starting to shake,
 The bad days will come to an end.
 And beware the revenge
 When the poor all get down to it . . .

The 'objective conditions' now being met, we would have nothing more to do than resolve as rapidly as possible the question of subjective conditions, under pain of vertiginous collapse into a barbarism of which the century already offered too many examples. We were in a hurry. In one debate within the Ligue, I summed up this sense of urgency in the phrase that 'history is biting us in the neck'. This formula had an unexpected success, becoming the maxim of our revolutionary impatience. The time was propitious for emphasis and grandiloquence. It would have been more sober and more exact to say that history was breathing down our necks.

If May 68 was the dress rehearsal, all that remained was to prepare for the grand première.

If May 68 was only a beginning, the rest remained to be written. We had to prepare for the founding congress of our new organisation. To launch a new paper, give ourselves statutes and programmatic documents. September saw the appearance of the fortnightly *Rouge*, with an enormous hammer and a formidable sickle on the front page, in a stylised form that would be easily recognisable – our 'logo', to use an anachronistic expression.

In the autumn, Alain Krivine was released from prison but had immediately to leave for his military service with the Verdun garrison! Jeanette Habel's apartment on the rue René-Boulanger, which I sublet from her, was very close to our tiny premises, at the corner of the rue du Faubourg-Saint-Denis and the rue du Faubourg-Saint-Martin. It became an annex. On certain sleepless nights it took on the look of Smolny.

After delivering to Maspero the manuscript of the book written with Henri Weber, and defending, at the home of Henri Lefebvre on the rue Rambuteau, my dissertation on the notion of revolutionary crisis, I extracted from this, with the help of Sami Naïr, an article on Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg for *Partisans* journal. This disciple of Lucien Goldmann and Serge Mallet, with an intellect as sharp as a razor, had just arrived from Algeria. He had the look of a hungry young wolf, poised for an assault on the capital. Our article became the theoretical reference point of an (ultra-) Leninism, dominated by the paroxysmic moment of the seizure of power.²

The most polemical question in the congress debates was whether our organisation should join the Fourth International. During the summer break, Henri Weber and Charles Michaloux, already members of the tiny French section, had undertaken to convince me of the project.* The dissolution of the Ligue, they argued, offered the opportunity for a new departure. We had to dare to break with the routines of a groupuscule, starting with bringing together in one organisation the stalwarts of the Parti Communiste Internationaliste and the youngsters of the JCR, before we could open a serious discussion with Lutte Ouvrière. These perspectives left me perplexed. From the Black Panthers to the Zengakuren,³ from the Guevarist *guerrilleros* to the Indochinese liberation movements, new heads were finally emerging, as André Breton had prophesied in 1953 in his 'Prolegomena to a Third Surrealist Manifesto'. Without having the slightest hostility to Trotskyism (I had the greatest respect for those veterans who had experienced the 'midnight in the century' evoked by Victor Serge without abandoning their faith), I felt rather that, with history accelerating, we had to turn the page, go forward to meet the new that was in the process of being born, and envisage an unprecedented Fifth International.

The congress debates sowed confusion in the ranks.⁴ Already before 1968, the majority of the JCR leadership defined themselves as Trotskyists,⁵ but they never sought to recruit me. Embarrassment? Timidity? Or rather, the elitist syndrome of a 'chosen people' with little inclination to proselytism (being 'chosen' does not go very well with conversion)? Perhaps my comrades simply thought that my singular status as 'independent' was useful to them as a pledge of the effective autonomy of the JCR in relation to the International and its French section, the Parti Communiste Internationaliste. At the end of the controversy, I finally made my decision, partly in negative reaction to the argument of the opponents of the Fourth International.⁶ The positive reasons were given me by Sami Naïr. Instead of insisting, as Ernest Mandel did, on an unlikely inventory of existing forces, he held to a purely logical demonstration. Isn't capitalism a world system of exploitation and domination, ruled by the law of uneven and combined development? Yes. Isn't an international

* Charles Michaloux (Aubin), a left-Zionist scout with Hachomer Hatzair (the Young Guard). In the UEC then the JCR, LC and LCR, serving on the politburo of the latter. Director-general of the ApexIsast group advising works commissions and on workplace health and safety.

revolutionary organisation needed to combat it? Yes. Well, there is one, certainly minuscule, but one that has survived without betraying or succumbing to the tests of a terrible century. Still in agreement? Ergo, it is up to us to join it, transform it, and make it the instrument that we need. What objection can be raised to such implacable logic?

Three weeks after the congress, a text signed by the 'non-Trotskyists' on our provisional leadership⁷ took a firm position in favour of membership. To rally the hesitators, all we had to do was stop hesitating ourselves. The impulse became irresistible. To avoid poisoning the atmosphere, we had envisaged a delaying compromise at the last minute, but the enthusiasm of the new young militants swamped us. You have to know how to end a debate!

At Easter 1969 the founding congress of the *Ligue Communiste* was held. Because of the ban still in force in France, it had to be held clandestinely in Mannheim, with the hospitable help of our German comrades. Michel Rotman organised an ingenious athletic diversion to smuggle in the delegates. The two hundred attending slept on the floor in a gymnasium. In the morning, they jostled at the few sinks available for a hasty wash. For apprentice revolutionaries dreaming of guerrillas and maquis, this was a minimum inconvenience. After three days of hot debate, the statutes, including the adhesion of the *Ligue Communiste* to the Fourth International, were accepted by 80 per cent of the delegates.

On our return to Paris, far from these poetic flights, prosaic French politics caught up with us. De Gaulle was preparing his referendum on institutional reform. To our eyes, a plebiscite was bound to be strongly favourable to its initiator. Henri Weber, however, who had a head for politics (the future senator already emerging from the rebel youth!), had a revelation when he flicked through the pile of newspapers awaiting us: 'They're going to ditch the old man!' It was clear from *Le Figaro* that de Gaulle envisaged defeat after being abandoned by Giscard. Draped in his dignity, he left for the Irish bogs. His resignation automatically led to the organisation of a presidential election.

Our recently elected national leadership was urgently summoned to the *cité universitaire* at Antony. Michel Rotman stopped by to collect me. On the way, he cautiously suggested that we might consider presenting a candidate. For an organisation of a thousand members, and an average age under twenty-four (at twenty-eight, Alain Krivine seemed a venerable figure; I was just twenty-three!),

that took a lot of cheek. Henri Weber was reticent, and not without reason: we didn't have a penny in our funds, or any experience of the media, and we weren't even familiar with the electoral law. We would break our neck by displaying our amateurism so flagrantly. This dissuasive speech culminated in one of those maxims of exotic wisdom that would characterise the future senator: 'The higher the monkey climbs up the tree, the more he shows his arse!' But even this sharp verdict failed to quench our intrepid enthusiasm. We thought first of all of Jean-Michel Krivine,* a respectable surgeon, still a member of the PCF, then of André Fichaut or Jeanette Habel. The solution suddenly burst out as self-evident. What about Alain Krivine, who was absent from this meeting, being at Verdun under the colours, but who, as a soldier, we hadn't thought would be eligible? This was not to show faith in the virtues of bourgeois democracy. Perplexed but disciplined, Alain accepted, without really assessing the lasting consequences. Candidate squaddie!

Thirty years later, you can say this was a good choice.

With his studious glasses and his tie (object of libertarian derision), Alain had the look of a romantic doctrinaire. But appearances can be misleading. Alain was rather a hyperactive pragmatist, inspired by a vocation for politics and a genuine passion. He showed himself to be incorruptible both materially and morally, as well as in relation to the media. The 1969 presidential campaign was only the second to profit from television. It was not certain that such a young candidate could resist so well the flattery and seduction of personalisation. Formed in the struggle against all forms of bureaucracy, Alain was a kind of reassuring elder brother, and an example of egalitarian rigour, always ready to play his part in hard graft, always available, even in the middle of the night, to rush to the aid of a comrade held in a police station, always ready to enjoy the most frugal snack or be satisfied with the most uncomfortable hospitality from a fellow militant.

This bundle of qualities had of course its counterpart in the way of faults. Out of a visceral reaction to all privilege and all hierarchical relations, Alain never liked to organise the work of others. Spurning any logic of power, he was a rare prototype of the leader who refuses to lead. Certainly this failing was better than its opposite would have

* Jean-Michel Krivine, 1932–2013, PCF and then FI member. Internationalist solidarity activist (Algeria, Nicaragua, Saint-Domingue, Thailand), member of Russell Tribunal and the Franco-Vietnamese Medical Association. Hospital surgeon.

been. All the same, this type of non-leadership often had disorganising effects, impeded collective work, and perpetuated an organisational *bricolage* that used up too much energy and good will. If Alain set the tone, we all had our share of responsibility in these constitutive features of our current.

Alain could only enjoy exceptional leave if he received the hundred signatures of local mayors that the electoral law required at that time, so I had to give the press conference announcing his entry into the lists of the presidential campaign. The journalists were not thick on the ground, but our boldness paid. *Rouge* began to appear every week.⁸ We had several hours' worth of television and radio spots, which we did not yet always know how to use. The apartment on the rue René-Boulanger was transformed into our campaign headquarters, and a permanent bivouac. We spent sleepless nights drafting speeches, leaflets, pamphlets and posters. One sympathiser put at our disposal a small tourist aircraft for provincial meetings. A visit to Marseille was particularly memorable. A valiant sailor, recently recruited, who was charged with meeting us at the airport, was moved by the importance of his mission to play the racing driver. After a couple of speedy corners, the car turned over. Getting out of the wreck through the shattered windscreen, we ended up at the feet of an astonished motorist who had just managed to avoid us. With the accent of the Marseille Vieux-Port, he cried: 'Come and see, Gilberte, it's Monsieur Krivine!' Alain's mug was then displayed every day on posters and TV screens. His sudden appearance in the midst of debris and shattered glass was a great joke.

Still under the shock, we reached the meeting covered in dust and with grazed limbs. As in the famous 'Grand métingue du métropolitain',^{*} a brawl suddenly erupted at the back of the hall. Our vigilant security service moved swiftly to throw these supposed disrupters out on their ear. The stage director Daniel Mesguich later told me, without hard feelings, that as a young municipal councillor he had been among the ruffians, and experienced the muscular assault of our red guards.[†]

The popularity of the squaddie candidate, recognised in the street and deluged with messages of sympathy, began to intoxicate us with electoral illusions. We were ready to dream of a surprising score.

* An 1887 music-hall song.

† Daniel Mesguich, born 1952, council communist. Actor, director, writer.

And so it was, but not in the sense we had hoped. Behind Georges Pompidou and Alain Poher, who alone remained in the field for the second round, Jacques Duclos had obtained some 20 per cent, the Defferre-Mendès tandem hardly 5 per cent, Michel Rocard around 3 per cent, and Alain Krivine only 1 per cent. Even an unknown Louis Ducatel did better.* Just a year after the general strike, this experience taught us much about the glacial slowness of electoral phenomena. The result was not dishonourable. It confirmed us none the less in the idea that elections were definitely the 'trap for fools' that we had denounced the previous year with the legislative elections, and that revolution would not involve the 'electoral farce'.⁹

During the campaign, my particular responsibility was to reply to mail that arrived for the candidate. Hundreds of letters brought a deluge of grievances, evoking the frustrations of the unsuccessful general strike, but also disputes over rents, administrative complaints, domestic quarrels, cats stuck up a tree despite the intervention of the fire department . . . I drew a definitive lesson from this. If an electoral result is indeed a statistically significant indicator, individual motivations are highly erratic.

The ways of the electoral urns are sometimes as impenetrable as those of the Lord.

Latin America was a kind of twin continent in our political imaginary. Cuba had proclaimed itself the first liberated territory of the New World. Che had abandoned the exercise of power to devote himself to permanent revolution. No matter where death had surprised him . . . It was in a remote and desolate Bolivian village. So many people, in Chile, Venezuela, Argentina and Uruguay, sought to take up the weapons he had left them with his farewell message to the Tricontinental. In a generational mirror game, we recognised kindred spirits in the young militants of the Chilean Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR), the Uruguayan MLN-Tupamaros, and a fortiori the Revolutionary Workers' Party of Argentina (a section of the Fourth International). These organisations were born in the decade of the shockwave triggered by the Algerian, Cuban and Vietnamese revolutions.

In April 1969, the 9th World Congress of the Fourth International decided on a solidarity campaign with Bolivia. The Peredo brothers

* Alain Poher was the candidate of the 'democratic centre', Jacques Duclos of the PCF, with Gaston Defferre (supported by former premier Pierre Mendès-France) for the SFIO, and Michel Rocard of the PSU. Louis Ducatel stood as an 'independent radical-socialist'.

were preparing to take up the struggle interrupted by the murder of Che.* We launched a collection of funds explicitly designed to buy arms for the guerrilla. In colleges all over France, intrepid school students climbed on roofs to unfurl scarlet streamers demanding weapons for a country that most of them would have had difficulty locating on the map, despite the educational sessions at which we explained, figures in hand, the strategic importance of tin production and traced the heroic epic of the miners of Siglo Veinte and Huanuni.

It was again for Bolivia that we brought together a group of sympathising actors and singers at the home of Delphine Seyrig.[†] They included Paul Crauchet and Jacques Charbit (son of the revolutionary syndicalist who had been a comrade of Monatte and Rosmer), former members of the support network for the Algerian FLN.[‡] There was also a very young Coline Serreau.[§] An unknown person

* Guido Álvaro Peredo Leigue 'Inti' (born April 30, 1937 in Cochabamba, Bolivia) and Roberto Peredo Leigue 'Coco' (born May 23, 1938 in Cochabamba, Bolivia) – both early participants and critical components of Che Guevara's Bolivian guerrilla, the National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional – ELN). They joined the Bolivian Communist Party (Partido Comunista Boliviano – PCB) youth wing when it was founded in 1950, and were among the most trusted and veteran cadre within it, in spite of their significant differences with the leadership over the armed struggle. Both were also critical in formation and support of other *foquista* groups in the region, notably the Argentinian People's Guerrilla Army (Ejército Guerrillero del Pueblo – EGP) – which operated near the border with Bolivia, and was meant to have been part of the strategic plan of which the Bolivian guerrilla was the center – and the Peruvian ELN, similar to the EGP. They would both die as part of the annihilation of the ELN upon defeat – Coco on 26 September 1967 fighting in the ELN, a few weeks before Che Guevara himself was executed, and Inti on 9 September 1969 after a siege, capture, and torture (after returning to Bolivia to try to restart the guerrilla as an urban effort).

† Delphine Seyrig, 1932–90, born in Lebanon to French parents, a film director and actress of stage and screen. Worked with directors such as Alain Resnais and François Truffaut, but perhaps best known in the Anglophone world for her appearance in *The Day of the Jackal*.

‡ Paul Crauchet, 1920–2012, theatre and film actor. A member of the clandestine Réseau Jeanson supporting the Algerian independence struggle, he spent seven months in prison in 1960 prior to his acquittal due to lack of evidence.

§ Jacques Charbit, 1929–2006, French actor, director, writer, from 1944 to 1947 member of the Socialist youth organisation, active supporter of the Algerian revolution as member of the Réseau Jeanson, in the 1970s member of LC/LCR.

§ Coline Serreau, born 1947, composer, conductor, actress and producer, she has staged various operas, operettas, plays and films (the first being *Mais qu'est-ce qu'elles veulent?* [1975], a feminist documentary), as well as the comedy *Trois hommes et un couffin* (1985), which achieved one of the largest ever audiences in France for any French film and was remade in English as *Three Men and a Baby*. Her 2010 documentary film *Solutions locales pour un désordre global* looked at growing alternatives to environmental destruction.

buttonholed Alain Krivine, to discuss with him the windfall he had received from Claude Lelouch's film *Un homme et une femme*. Alain, knowing little about cinema, imagined he was talking about the white slave trade or some other illegal traffic. The man in question was the singer-songwriter Pierre Barouh.*

Not discouraged, we embarked on a masterly presentation about the strategic role of Bolivia, the 1952 revolution, the pillage of mineral resources, the theory of permanent revolution. The audience rapidly began to show signs of fatigue and distraction. Our guests politely awaited the moment to chat around the buffet where wine and olives were laid out.

Our didactic zeal didn't weaken for all that. We refused to reproduce with our sympathisers the relationship of utilitarian manipulation that often marked the relationship of the PCF to fellow-traveling intellectuals, confined to the role of signatures on petitions and decorative trophies on electoral platforms. We insisted that their support should be based on detailed information and reasoned conviction. Perhaps this was naïve. But after so many years when intellectuals served simply as petition fodder, our scruples were respectable.¹⁰

Following the discussion, Delphine Seyrig whispered to me in her mysterious and caressing voice, in which I heard the captivating echoes of *Stolen Kisses*, that she would keep a room available for visiting Bolivian miners.

Preparation for the congress was not just hard grind. Alexandra, a distant relative of Jane Fonda, was a young American aged seventeen. In 1968, during the Sorbonne occupation, she arrived at the JCR booth on a pair of roller skates, wearing leggings and a mini-skirt. She left with a bundle of leaflets under her arm, to go and convert the stagehands at the Opéra and the bronze-makers. I fell under the charm of her appreciative gaze, her overflowing vitality and her delicious Hollywood accent. She combined an American false naïvety with a New York Jewish humour. Her grandfather, a fundraiser for Israel and a friend of Ben-Gurion, had made an appearance in *Exodus*. Her mother Mary-Jo, a friend of Aimé Césaire and René Leibowitz, and a signatory of the Manifeste des 121, was a picturesque Austro-Jewish-American, thick-set and resourceful,

* Pierre Barouh, born 1934, composer, writer and actor, appeared in *Un homme et une femme* and was also responsible for the soundtrack. This film was a great success and won the Palme d'Or at the 1966 Cannes film festival.

rather akin to Costello (of Abbott) and involved with support networks for deserters from the US Army.

Besides her valuable bilingualism, 'Alex' had the rare skill – at that time – of dexterity on the typewriter. This led to her being mobilised more often than her due turn to type internal bulletins for the preparatory debates of the founding congress. One evening in January 1969, tired of the clattering of the machine and polemics over organisational principles or the 'dialectic of sectors of intervention', we decided to go out dancing at the Roméo Club. This was the start of a romance that lasted two happy years. As in love songs, however, it had a rather sad ending.

In these years of liberation of morals and attacks on the sanctuarising of private life, militants sought to free themselves from outdated prejudices about relationships and fidelity. Despite solemn shared proclamations of liberation, however, individuals were not all equal in the face of jealousy and heartache. The old Adam (or Eve) is not so easily shed. If one might hope to overthrow political power by assault, or revolutionise property relations by legislative decision, the Oedipus complex or the incest temptation cannot be abolished by decree. The transformation of mentalities and cultures is a matter of very *longue durée*.

I wanted to experience to the full my passion with Alex, but I couldn't (and didn't want to) break with Martine, a nervous and anorexic lady: a dilemma of novelistic banality. If, following a slogan of the time, we were determined to 'live without down time', this was not always compatible with the vow to 'enjoy without obstacle'. On top of repeated demonstrations and interminable meetings, we conducted an exhausting agitprop activity under the wing of Clovisse Versa, a teacher in Cannes who had been expelled from the PCF. Evidence of this, besides the run of the paper, is the impressive number of pamphlets published in two years, both in the collection 'Classiques rouges' and in an educational series, as well as leaflets written day by day in response to Nixon's speeches or French government projects to criminalise drugs. A phlegmatic cinephile, Clovis was inspired by a kind of pedagogic genius allied to an acute sense of opportunity. He made a great contribution to the quality and quantity of our prolific literature.

Caught up in a fearsome whirlwind of activities, I also found myself torn between two relationships and entangled in a time budget as baroque as Postman Cheval's Ideal Palace. These years of double

life left me, perhaps not with regrets, but with a painful and bitter aftertaste.

Early in 1971, therefore, I faced departure for military service with a certain relief, forcibly cutting, as it would, ties that had become stifling. My comrades decided that I should apply for discharge on health grounds. Despite our republication of the classics of revolutionary anti-militarism in the collection 'Classiques rouges', 'They give you a rifle, use it!' had not yet become a sacrosanct command. The class of 1946 was oversupplied, and the 68-ers too rebellious for the army. The ministry of defence was not unhappy at skimming many recruits off on the least pretext. After a few weeks under observation at the Larey military hospital in Toulouse, the authorities notified me of my exemption, giving me to understand perfectly well that they were not duped by my simulated illness.¹¹ During this enforced stay in hospital, to struggle against the boredom of empty days on a camp bed I gave myself up to the reading of *Death in Venice* and *Cancer Ward*. Gloomy meditations.

Such a dispensation from military service would have been for most people a cause for rejoicing, but I received the news with mixed feelings. My stay in military accommodation meant that my love life remained in suspense for a few months, until my first appointment as a certified teacher at the lycée of Condé-sur-Escaut. True to our great hopes, none of us made anything much in the way of career plans. In 1969, the *agrégation* examinations in philosophy turned to farce. A struggle committee was formed, against exams in general and the *agrégation* in particular. The day of the written exam, fearing an active boycott, the police stood guard around the Sainte-Geneviève library. While confusion reigned and there was lively discussion on whether or not to write the exam papers, the barrels of guns appeared above the library shelves. 'We're not taking the *agreg* with a rifle at our backs!' Alain Brossat and I stoked the flames of sedition, to the great despair of our studious fellow-students. There was weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth. The sitting was postponed until the autumn.

The following year, the competition fell on the hundredth anniversary of Lenin's birth. The Ligue celebrated the event with a meeting at the Mutualité. This took place on the eve of the last test. The meeting ended joyfully, but very late, followed by supper at the Épi d'Or. The next day, I was hardly in a state to face the thorny question of 'Leibniz's God'. I came to a complete dead end on monadology and

theodicy, and my whole theological imagination was not enough to see me through. No matter. The old world was in its death-throes. Ernest Mandel promised us a revolution in Europe within five years. To hell with the *agreg!* It wasn't even worth filling in your tax return. I convinced Henri Weber of this, and one fine day he found himself and his furniture outside his apartment, with the bailiff's seal on the door.

The same year of 1970–71, I did my CAPES' practical first at Jean-Baptiste Say (where the lycée student Michel Field, active in the Ligue, turned out to be an agitator with a great future), then at La Fontaine (where my fellow apprentice turned out to be a certain Sylvaine Agacinski) and at the Auteuil École Normale (where my team-mate was Patrick Viveret, a promising young supporter of Michel Rocard).[†] At the return to class in September, I received my marching orders. My request had been modest, either Gourdon (on the railway from Paris to Toulouse) or Vendôme (in homage to Pierre de Ronsard), or – with little hope – Sète, where the sand is so fine. Condé-sur-Escaut! I didn't have the faintest idea where this charming little town was situated, but the river Escaut immediately conjured up a foggy dampness:

*Avec de l'Italie qui descendrait l'Escaut,
Avec Frida la Blonde, quand elle devient Margot . . .[‡]*

But nothing daunts the fearless and irreproachable black – or red – hussar of the Republic. Politzer had been sent to Cherbourg. Nizan had landed up at Bourg-en-Bresse, Lefebvre at Clermont. I could be

* Certificat d'aptitude au professorat de l'enseignement du second degré.

† Michel Field (Michel Beauchamp), born 1955, an LC activist from age fourteen. Expelled from the Lycée Claude Bernard in May 1971 for haranguing his classmates. One of the leaders of the movement against the Debré Law (making it harder to delay or avoid military service). On 3 April 1973 he confronted the education minister Joseph Fontanet in a TV debate, with some success. Today a well-known mainstream TV and radio presenter.

Sylvaine Agacinski, born 1945, French feminist philosopher, associated with 'differentialism', since 1994 married to Lionel Jospin.

Patrick Viveret, born 1948, was in the 1960s a member of the Christian-Left youth movement JEC, then in the PSU after May 68. Then joined the Parti Socialiste, directing the democratic-socialist reviews *Faire* and *Intervention*. Appointed by Rocard to the Cour des Comptes (state audit council) in 1990, later responsible under the Jospin government for a report on measuring inequality and wealth indicators. In 2006 behind the complementary currency 'Sol', designed to promote a 'solidarity economy'.

‡ Lines from the Jacques Brel song 'Le Plat Pays'.

modestly satisfied with Condé. The lycée recruited its students from an area of thirty kilometres around, mainly families of miners or engineering workers. I rented a tiny room above a roadside petrol station. In the evening I dined in its restaurant. The regulars had pigeonholes for their check table-napkins. The owner stamped your bill with a voucher, ten of which entitled you to a free meal. Time flowed slowly on the banks of the Escaut.

The Condé lycée had scarcely been touched by the earthquake of 1968. At the first teachers' meeting, a Thermidorean headmaster announced, in turgid claptrap, that he would be available 'at the centre of everything, like a resonant echo'. He strongly advised against reading *Le Monde* in the staff room. An English teacher was even hauled over the coals for having his students listen to folk music. Our colleagues looked askance at the formation of a union branch, suspected of sowing discord in their little community. The main activity of their 'club' was devoted to organising disorderly excursions on Saturday evenings, to enjoy a *couscous royal* across the Belgian border. What an adventure! Life at Condé was spiced with the forbidden pleasures of *harissa* . . .

A few days into the new term, the 'resonant echo' sharply chided me for having recommended students to spare their families the cost of the famous two-volume philosophy textbook by Huisman and Vergès. This book, stressing the separation between action and knowledge, was hardly a good sign. It seemed to me all the more unnecessary in that the *Communist Manifesto* was officially on the curriculum. Purchase of this would be more economical and more profitable. The local bookshop, which specialised in second-hand textbooks, thus remained with an unsold stock. My Paris arrogance had interrupted its annual business cycle and the patient accumulation of its tiny commercial capital. The admonition I received was the result of the shop having complained to the principal. A note in the far-right *Minute* reported the arrival of the Paris philosophical *chien-lit* in the peaceful town of Condé.

My pedagogic experience there did not last long. I stuck to my post bravely, like the hero of *The Tartar Steppe*, while civil war was brewing up behind.* My comrades believed I was wasting time. And so I deserted, my only regret being for my students, still sleepy in the mornings, who lived mainly in housing estates with no cinema or

* *Il deserto dei Tartari*, a novel by Italian author Dino Buzzati, published in 1940.

library, and the TV as their only window on the world. The girls wore pleated sky-blue skirts, and pullovers with patches on the shoulders, far indeed from the low necklines and sexy miniskirts of the seductive students of La Fontaine. After classes, the students killed time in a bar while waiting for the school bus. I preferred their company to games of table football with my colleagues, old before their time. We played epic games of the 7-14-21 drinking game, with horrible draughts of Vinadox and grenadine, Fernet-Branca and lemonade, and other concoctions each more disgusting than the other. When I took leave of them to prepare for revolution, they offered me a bound copy of *Les Chants de Maldoror*, inscribed with touching dedications.* Months later I still received letters from these adolescents, full of tender distress and interminable boredom.

This fleeting exile on the banks of the Escaut was an opportunity to tidy up my disorderly love life. On Sunday evenings I took the train from Paris to Valenciennes, returning on Thursday afternoon. There was little time to sandwich in my two love affairs between all the meetings. The combination of teaching, political, emotional and sexual activity became unsupportable. The break-up with Alex was already under way, though separation was no less painful. I tried to appease an indefinable sadness by reading Aragon's *Roman inachevé* and *Les Yeux d'Elsa*. On the other hand, Martine became pregnant – the father was a mutual friend. She left to have an abortion in England. On return, she learned of the death of one of her best friends in a road accident. She started drinking, and increasingly had a raw and hunted look. From emotional upset to marital disaster, career disappointment to odd jobs, her suffering became an endless trail of stations of the cross.

Martine died in the Montpellier hospital in January 2000, a few days before her fifty-fourth birthday. I would never have imagined she would have the strength to pursue her declining life for so long. Her funeral was a desolate reflection of her disordered existence. At Saint-Bauzille-de-Montmel, where she then lived, she was the first person buried in the new cemetery. On the day of the funeral, a snow-storm fell on the village. Her solitary open grave made a dark hole in the virgin snow. Neither flowers nor wreaths: the florist had mistaken the address and made the delivery to the church in another village.

* *Les Chants de Maldoror*: Poetic novel written in 1868–69 by the Comte de Lautréamont (pseudonym of Isidore Lucien Ducasse). An inspiration to many surrealists.

Some twenty of us¹² stood sobbing and stamping our feet, while waiting for an unlikely hearse that had got lost in the weather. The coffin was eventually lowered into the frozen ground. Martine's son David, who had been rescued from a chaotic childhood, pronounced the words of farewell. I read a few extracts from old letters, full of distress and black humour. Martine always exercised a magnetic attraction on the people around her, arousing devotion and infinite patience. She never showed any gratitude in return. As if this society could never render her more than a tiny part of her due.

Between social conflicts, university and school student mobilisations, solidarity campaigns with Vietnam, skirmishes with the far-right groups at street markets, 1970 and 1971 sped by on the wing. We sometimes organised up to three lightning actions in a single day, from hanging a banner on a monument to occupying an embassy or consulate. In January 1972, for Richard Nixon's investiture, the American embassy organised a reception at a large hotel. We knew Che's farewell message by heart: harass the enemy everywhere, so that he never feels secure. We printed false invitation cards and smuggled in, among the carefully filtered guests, a group of 'plain-clothes' militants. They dressed up well enough in suits and ties to be above suspicion. The ceremony ended up in a slapstick brawl worthy of a Marx Brothers film.

In January 1972 I set off for Toulouse to organise a defence campaign for three comrades¹³ who had been arrested at the Spanish border on New Year's Eve, with bundles of underground literature hidden in the panels of their vehicle. After satisfactorily turning the page (one page each!) on my defunct love affairs, I plunged body and soul into games of love and chance. This new disorder went hand in hand with a political forward flight.

We had long been repeating that 'the problem of power is raised'.* Under the impulse of Gérard Guégan, the Champ Libre imprint was republishing classical texts of strategy.[†] I was responsible, along with Robert March, for relations with the first nuclei, in Catalonia and Madrid, of what would become our sister organisation in the Spanish

* See below, p. 107.

† Gérard Guégan, born 1940, writer and film critic. From 1958 a member of the UEC, he worked for two years on the cultural section of *L'Humanité*. Broke with the PCF after May 68. In 1969 was among the founders of far-left publishing house Champ Libre, but forced out in 1974.

state.* At the same time, we had several meetings, in Bayonne and Bordeaux, with the leaders of the '6th Assembly' ETA. This group, a majority at their organisation's last congress, had developed from traditional Basque nationalism towards a Guevarist internationalism under the influence of the Cuban revolution. Four of their number, including José Iriarte ('Bikila'), held a hunger strike in the church of Saint-Lambert in spring 1972.[†] Curled up in their duvets, they received several visits of support, from Simone de Beauvoir and Gisèle Halimi among others.

This new ETA leadership had produced a manifesto boldly titled 'Euskadi, the European Cuba'. The diehard nationalists accused them of '*españolismo*' for collecting funds in support of building workers on strike in Andalucía. We believed our new friends to be influenced by Maoism, and had therefore proposed putting on the agenda of our meetings a balance sheet of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, in exchange for a presentation on their part on the national question. Not giving a fig for Maoism, they didn't understand very clearly why we insisted on talking about China. No more did they pay much attention to the studious notes we provided for an article in their underground organ, *Zutik*.

In this spring of 1972, we were equally proud of the exploits of our Argentinian sister organisation, the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (PRT). It had made international headlines in 1969 with its role in the popular uprisings in Córdoba and Rosario, then by spectacular prison breakouts, and finally with the kidnapping and execution of the head of Fiat Argentina. One day, a smartly dressed man in his fifties arrived at the fortified entry to our office at 10, impasse Guéménée. He had been sent by the multinational to make contact with 'our Argentinian friends', with the object of preventively negotiating a kind of immunity for the executives of his company over there.

* Robert March (Paco Rops), graduated from the École Centrale, professor at an engineering school. A member of the LCR politburo, with a particular interest in questions of armed struggle. A Latin America specialist.

[†] José Iriarte 'Bikila', born 1945 in Renteria in the Basque country. He joined ETA in 1964 and in 1973 participated in the fusion between ETA VI and the LCR (section of the Fourth International in the Spanish state), to form the Basque sister organisation the LKI. During the 1980s he was a member of the FI leadership. In 1991 he participated in the fusion of the LKI with the EMK (Communist Movement in Euskadi) founding an independent revolutionary organisation, *Zutik*. This organisation disintegrated some twenty years later. Bikila is now spokesperson for the Basque anti-capitalist organisation *Gorripidea*.

At Easter I made my first conspiratorial trip to Barcelona. In the early hours of the morning, the names of Catalan villages passed by like so many places haunted by the phantom characters of Ramón Sender's *Seven Red Sundays*, or the novels of Arturo Barrea and Juan Marsé. Armed with a textbook of *Espagnol en 90 leçons* and a few copies of *Mafalda*, I tried to revive my memories of Latin conjugations and master the use of *ser* and *estar*. When the Talgo train passed the little stations of Massanet and Fornells in the grey dawn, I saluted the memory of Francisco Sabaté Llopart. On 6 January 1960 he had been arrested, carrying arms, on the 06:20 train for Barcelona. A rearguard fighter in a lost war, he was wounded, then killed, at San Celoni. His odyssey is traced in Eric Hobsbawm's *Bandits*, which had just appeared in French.

I had a rendezvous in a dark bar on the Paseo de Gracia, opposite Gaudí's Pedrada. A small man with a moustache introduced himself as 'Agustín', like someone from the pages of Malraux's *Man's Hope*. He was a young engineering worker, dark-haired and swarthy, like the men in the newsreels of May 1937, dressed in blue overalls and a beret, a cigarette between his lips and a finger on the trigger, defending the Telefonica on the Plaza Cataluña.

Our discreet conclave was held on a housing estate in Hospitalet de Llobregat. At that time, such meetings had a bit of a festive air. The majority of our comrades were living a hidden and underground existence. Jesus Idogaya 'Pexto', for example, stayed holed up for a year in a flat in Pamplona, from where he edited the clandestine ETA-6 press. The organisation generously presented him with an exercise bike as an outlet for his overflowing energy. (After ending a hunger strike in Bayonne, Pexto swallowed some twenty cutlets before our terrified eyes.) Meetings were the occasion for warm re-encounters and a friendly relaxation. A thousand stories were exchanged, the least sign of rebellion against the regime was monitored. People busied themselves round the hearth where *butifarras* dripping with fat were roasting. The soul of the group was Enrique, the son of reserved Catalan peasants.¹⁴

At this Easter meeting in 1972, the Madrileños were preparing a historic Mayday, inspired by the patterns of mobilisation that had been tried out in France: secondary rendezvous, strictly timed trajectories, mobile groups and Molotov cocktails. It was a bold operation, and successful despite the arrests. After the 1969 repression against the student movement, it confirmed a revival of combativeness and represented a (modest) moral victory.

The person who explained the battle plan to me, armed with a sketch, was introduced as El Moro.* A native of Melilla, this Moor had the head of a bird of prey, cutting speech and a sense of effectiveness. Over the years, we became the greatest of friends. In 1973, following a wave of executions in Madrid (our apparatus, the 'appa', was hardly a year old), the leadership of the LCR-ETA-VI (which had become the section of the Fourth International in the Spanish state after a merger between the Liga and ETA-VI) had to move to Barcelona. El Moro shared a lodging there with two Basque comrades, Petxo and Xirri, close to the old popular quarter of Pueblo Seco and El Molino.† When the TV broadcast a match of Atletico Bilbao, the world revolution paused in its tracks. Iced beers emerged from the fridge and, as if ourselves present on the terraces, we chanted 'At-le-ti-co! At-le-ti-co!' to salute the exploits of a team that was 100 per cent Basque, including a number of players (such as the goalkeeper Iribar) who were reputedly ETA sympathisers.¹⁵

Before catching my return train to Montpellier, I spent my last hours strolling in the neighbourhood of the Falcon hotel, the legendary headquarters of POUM in 1937, following the tracks of the derelict character in Manfiargues's *La Marge*, and tasting *churros* saturated in oil on the Plaza Real, accompanied by *horchata de chufa*.

The Montpellier comrades were at the heart of the winegrowers' unrest in the Midi. Already before 1968, the Occitan singer Claude Marti and the winegrower Claude Rives were members of the JCR in Carcassonne.‡ When the Occident heavies threatened to disrupt

* Miguel Romero 'El Moro', born in 1945 in Melilla, Morocco, was a militant of the Frente de Liberación Popular, a Guevarist organisation very active on university campuses in the late 1960s. Subsequently in the LCR, in which he was a member of the leadership until it dissolved in 1991 on fusing with the Movimiento Comunista. He was a member of the leadership of the Fourth International from the end of the 1970s until the beginning of the 1990s, including a period in the early 1980s as a full-timer for the Bureau in Paris. Today an activist of the Izquierda Anticapitalista and editor of the journal *Viento Sur*.

† José Vicente Idogaya 'Petxo', born 1948, was the principal leader of ETA-VI, the then-majority current of ETA, which fused with the LCR in 1972. Was leader of the unified organisation and subsequently of the LKI, when it was agreed that the Basque organisation of the LCR-ETA-VI should be independent and take the name LKI. Chair of Social Communication at the Universidad del País Vasco. Part of the advisory board of the journal *Viento Sur*.

‡ Claude Marti, born 1940, JCR member (Carcassonne), activist for the *occitaniste* cause (Institut d'Etudes occitanes). School teacher, singer, poet, novelist.

Claude Rives, JCR member (Carcassonne). Farmer and leading figure in the winegrowers' action committees (Comités d'action viticoles).

performances of plays by Armand Gatti at the Grenier in Toulouse, Maurice Sarrazin provided us with free seats in exchange for neutralising the troublemakers.* We summoned Marty as reinforcement. He arrived with members of his weightlifting club, their forearms bursting with impressive muscles. At the first shouts of the reactionaries, 'Shakespeare, not Gatti!', our robust Occitan guard imposed silence on these ranters, who were surprised by this muscular defence of popular culture.

The 'red Midi' was in ferment, rekindling the glorious memories of Marcellin Albert and his '*brave pioupiou du 17e*'.† Marti sung 'La Commune de Narbonne'. Claude Rives and Jean Huillet organised 'winegrowers' action committees' able to mobilise hundreds of winegrowers in a few hours at any point in the Aude or Herault.‡ Today a Socialist regional councillor and pillar of the Convention pour la VIe République, our comrade Paul Alliès inspired the *Cahiers Occitanie Rouge*, which carved out a niche for itself and disputed the terrain of Occitanism with the regionalists.§

Under the stimulus of the impending death agony of Francoism, inspired by the winegrowers' revolt and in solidarity with the distant Argentinian guerrilla, Paul Alliès, Antoine Artous, Armand Creus ¶ and myself published a contribution to the preparatory debates of the third congress of the Ligue in spring 1972, under the title: 'Is the question of power raised? Let's raise it!' This aroused the indignation of some and the enthusiasm of others. The 'BI-30' (internal bulletin no. 30) became a kind of manifesto of ultra-leftism in our ranks. Whatever its failings in political sense, it made up in terms of formal logic. In 1969, the 9th World Congress had adopted an orientation of

* Maurice Sarrazin, born 1925, actor-director. Founded the Compagnie du Grenier de Toulouse.

† These 'squaddies of the 17th', celebrated in a popular song, mutinied in Béziers when sent to repress the revolt of the winegrowers in 1907.

‡ Jean Huillet, originally from Béziers, a leader of the Comités d'action viticoles and member of Lutte Occitane in the mid-70s. Very concerned with regionalist politics, at one point close to the Montpellier LCR.

§ Paul Alliès (Stéphane, Guilhem), professor of political science at the University of Montpellier. Driving force behind the LCR in this city in the 1970s and 1980s, founder and editor of the *Cahiers Occitanie Rouge*, member of the central committee. Several times an LCR electoral candidate, particularly in Sète.

¶ Armand Creus (alias Arthur), born 1948, a student leader in Perpignan in May 68. In the LC, arrested for his anti-militarist work; in the LCR, co-founder of the Lyon coordination for vigilance against the far right. Now a regional councillor for the Front de Gauche in Rhône-Alpes, and member of the Gauche Unitaire.

armed struggle for Latin America. In Chile under the Popular Unity government, threats of coup d'état were direct. In Spain, Francoism was still hanging on. Italy was in permanent effervescence, from 'creeping Mays' to 'hot autumns'. In terms of strike figures, Britain challenged Italy for top position. Ernest Mandel predicted imminent revolutionary eruptions in Europe. Fatal confusion between the performative statement of a conditional strategic prophecy and a divinatory prediction!

It was impossible, however, to claim indefinitely that 'objective conditions' had reached the point of being over-ripe, and at the same time rest content with deploring the absence of a 'subjective factor' up to the task, or denouncing the eternal betrayals of bureaucratic leaderships. It was urgent to correct this divergence between subject and object. All the more so as our press denounced the 'advance of the strong state' on a weekly basis, and the passing of exceptional legislation that would subsequently pale in relation to the security policies of Sarkozy and recent 'anti-terrorist' laws. A dramatically unequal struggle was thus impending. The plausible hypothesis of a Chilean scenario, in the event of an electoral victory of the left, raised the problem of a development of our own military forces. The classics had called for subversive work in the army. We had made a start on this,¹⁶ establishing a mysterious 'front of revolutionary soldiers, sailors and airmen'. We also studied the classic experiences of urban insurrection, as analysed under the pseudonym A. Neuberg in the Comintern volume *Armed Insurrection*, republished at this time by Maspero, and that of the Asturias rising as related by Manuel Grossi.*

Urban insurrection was a confrontation of rapid decision. We did not see very well how, in a modern state with a strong institutional and democratic tradition, we could build up forces over a long term. France was not China. It did not have the vast expanses that the young Mao could count on in his famous 1927 pamphlet *How Can Red Political Power Exist in China?* A rebel peasantry, moreover, was not a more favourable milieu than the factories that had seen a primitive accumulation of military experience and homemade weapons. The legendary precedent of the Limousin maquis led by George Guingoin under the German occupation was evidence of this. Finally, the small-arms factory set up by Michel Pablo on the Moroccan border to

* See A. Neuberg et al., *Armed Insurrection* (London: New Left Books, 1970); Manuel Grossi, *L'Insurrection des Asturies* (Paris: EDI, 1970).

help the Algerian FLN held pride of place in the golden legend of the Fourth International.¹⁷ We even envisaged repeating this operation for our Basque and Spanish comrades, in the perspective of a rapid fall of the Franquist regime. It was not a purely theoretical question.¹⁸

This was the time of 'hasty Leninism', according to Régis Debray's formula in *La Critique des armes*, except that the '*foquismo*', whose theorist he was, was hardly Leninist despite being hasty.¹⁹ Our feverish impatience was inspired by a phrase from Trotsky that was often cited in our debates: 'The crisis of humanity is summed up in the crisis of its revolutionary leadership'. If this was indeed the case, nothing was more urgent than to resolve this crisis. The duty of each person was to contribute his or her little strength, as best they could, to settle this alternative between socialism and barbarism. It was in part up to them, therefore, whether the human species sank into a twilight future or blossomed into a society of abundance. This vision of history charged our frail shoulders with a crushing responsibility. In the face of this implacable logic, impoverished emotional life or professional ambition did not weigh very heavy. Each became personally responsible for the fate of humanity.

A fearsome burden.

The Time of 'Hasty Leninism'

Every secret society contains a still more secret society behind it, one that either perceives the secret, protects it, or executes sanctions for its divulging. [. . .] Every secret society contains its mode of action, itself secret, by way of influence, slipping, insinuation, seepage, pressure, dark radiation, from where passwords and secret languages are born.

— Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari

In February 1972, the Maoist militant Pierre Overney was killed by a security guard outside the Renault plant at Billancourt. The procession escorting his remains from the Gare de l'Est to Père-Lachaise was impressive. The Ligue's cortège was covered with scarlet banners stamped with the hammer and sickle, and preceded by a wreath bristling with thorns. Sophie was appointed to carry it. It was biting cold, and I took the pretext to gallantly lend her my gloves.

Sophie had joined the Ligue in summer 1968, but vanished almost immediately. Her Swiss husband had been expelled as a foreigner, following a police raid at the exit of a meeting. Condemned to enforced exile in Switzerland, she made rare appearances in Paris to meet her lawyers and make the necessary applications for his expulsion to be suspended. During one of these brief visits we met up at Henri Weber's. Under a chapka, the blue gaze of her deep-set eyes gave her the look of a Tolstoyan heroine or a princess from the steppes. As if the Manon of my childhood had erupted into my life:

And suddenly all fell silent when Manon appeared,
Manon in all her beauty herself and ineffable youth . . .

This brief encounter, with no words exchanged, was also — alas! — without a sequel. In autumn 1970, Sophie reappeared. When her

figure and proud bearing appeared in profile, in the blinding light of the alley at the door of Chez Robert where we used to lunch, I buried my face in my plate. Seduced, amazed, intimidated.

She would sometimes shut herself away for an afternoon to write the 'Red Mole' leaflet for the Nord-Aviation factory at Châtillon. She had abandoned school well before matriculating for a career as an actress, interrupted by the May events. Without formal qualifications, she proved a virtuoso in the art of writing crystal-clear leaflets, full of educational facts but without the least trace of stuffiness. This reputation led her to be invited to give 'mole leaflet' lessons to certain well-meaning academics, unable to develop a convincing argument for 'equal wages for all', or to argue the cause of the Airbus against the costly prestige operation of Concorde. Despite being only twenty-three and naturally reserved, Sophie did not flinch, at the gates of Snias,* from polemical jousts with union officials, stupefied by the cheek of this young amazon. All the more so as her voice, with drama training, enabled her to hold her own against their nasal megaphones.

The 'gloves' episode was the first sign of an impending relationship between us. My confused feelings already went beyond the point of tender friendship, but I respected (up to a certain point) the marriage tie, and wrapped myself in my natural shyness – too beautiful for me? And then, to tell the truth, I was in no hurry to rush back into the disorders of a love affair. I had planned to enjoy as long as possible the rediscovered charm of an adventurous bachelor life.

Pierre Overney's funeral has often been interpreted as the swan-song of May 1968. It was, in fact, a kind of melancholy apotheosis and farewell to poetic illusions. After the demonstration, we retreated to the impasse Guéménée. At Chez Robert, the patron, visibly disturbed, told us that someone was waiting for us. To our surprise, it was Michel Piccoli who was freezing on a bench at the back of the deserted room.† At this time, the Ligue held meetings at his place around a bulletin, *Télé 7-Rouge*, designed for radio and television staff. Under the impact of recent events, he wanted to get more involved, and even mooted the possibility of becoming a full-timer for the Ligue. We had to

* Société Nationale Industrielle Aérospatiale.

† Michel Piccoli, born 1925, actor, has worked with directors such as Jean Renoir, Alfred Hitchcock and Luis Buñuel. Member of the Mouvement de la Paix, and from 1981 a frequent supporter of Parti Socialiste candidates. Outspoken opponent of the Front National.

explain to him carefully that it wasn't so easy. Bolshevism *oblige*: before his cell could propose him for such a position, he had first to be a temporary militant for a year, then a full member, etc. Our dissuasive pedagogy convinced him without too much difficulty. Two years later, he put up the financial bond needed for us to purchase on credit the equipment we needed to launch *Rouge Quotidien*. This was a bold and generous gesture. Organisations of the revolutionary left were highly unstable and rarely solvent. But we always did our best to honour the payments on this debt, a moral as well as a financial one.

In 1972, Pierre Overney's funeral symbolised a change in the political landscape. The new Socialist Party had been born the previous year at the Épinay congress. Caught up in our hurried agitation, we had scarcely paid attention to what we perceived as superficial changes in French politics. But we had to heed the evidence. At the end of June 1972, the *Programme commun* was signed by François Mitterrand for the Socialists, Georges Marchais for the PCF, and Robert Fabre (who remembers the pharmacist from Rodez?) for the Left Radicals. We immediately responded by writing that same night a prophetic pamphlet: *Quand ils seront ministres* [When they are ministers]. As I wrote, the pages were typed up and set to page by Sophie.

In the early morning, convinced of having saved our souls by serving as best we could the historic interests of the proletariat, Sophie and I had our first café-crème together, tête-à-tête, at the Gare d'Austerlitz. We then each went home, very well behaved. But Cupid had shot his dart. The taxi carrying us seemed to lift off to the stars. When Sophie got out, on the place Saint-Sulpice, she overcame my modesty by slipping on my lips the sweet kiss of a promise. If the *Programme commun* disappointed many people by its failure to change the world, at least it had this beneficial side-effect.

As on a more sophisticated Carte du Tendre, the initial approaches had begun a few weeks earlier. One Sunday in May, with nothing else to do, I turned up at the Ligue's office in late afternoon to correct the proofs of an internal bulletin. I had the happy surprise of finding Sophie there, busy roneoing her leaflet. We had dinner together at the Procope. Her oblique smile gave the corner of her lips a touch of amused curiosity. She seemed to be saying, 'I can see you coming, you rascal . . .' Sophie's eyes could switch in an instant from insolent irony to stormy anger or sudden outbursts of laughter. Severe and mocking at the same time, their gravity cut through me like a blade.

Petrified, I began to stammer without pausing for breath, as if the least silence could be fatal. Seized by panic, unable to sustain the steely gaze amused by my disarray, I looked up at the stucco mouldings of the venerable café as if hunting for cracks where I could hide and disappear if need be.

Two days after the memorable night of the *Programme commun*, after an anti-Franco meeting in Toulouse, I again turned up at the weekend in the Ligue office, as if by chance. As if by chance, too, Sophie was working at the layout table. What a very strange coincidence . . . I twisted and turned in a dilapidated armchair, not knowing how to advance our story towards a happy ending. We ended up, in a kind of false improvisation, by casually deciding to see a movie. It was *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Before flying off into remote galaxies, we had a quick and prosaic meal in a brasserie. The paper table-covers gave the month's horoscope, and the forecast could not have been more favourable. Both of us being Aries, the stars clearly agreed in predicting good fortune for us in our emotional life. The next day, Sophie climbed up to my apartment on rue Ernest-Renan, six floors with no lift. As if to cautiously indicate that this was a trial in living together, not a removal of indefinite duration, she brought only a small suitcase.

This 'temporary' situation has lasted until today. We were not on the wrong track.

The rest of 1972 slipped by like a fairytale. After the big July demonstration on Larzac, we left with Paul Allières and Geneviève ('Patchou') for a 'road movie' across Spain. We strolled around the Barrio Chino, still faithful to its legend, and a Barceloneta not yet sacrificed to the gods of the Olympics. We made a stop at Alcoy, haunted by ghosts of the civil war. We saluted in passing the arena of Ronda and the palm forest of Elche. We entered Granada humming Lorca's poems. In Seville we attended a mediocre *corrida* and sampled the flamenco dives for tourists. We returned by way of Alcaraz, Albacete (where the heavy figure of André Marty still seemed to prowl), then Poblet and Urgel.* As the kilometres unfurled, we

* André Marty, 1886–1956, a naval engineering officer, he was at the head of the French sailors' mutiny on the Black Sea in solidarity with the Russian Revolution. Condemned to twenty years' forced labour – but elected an MP in 1924 – he joined the politburo of the PCF and the Executive Secretariat of the Communist International. Chief political commissar of the International Brigades during the Spanish civil war. Expelled from the PCF after WWII, together with Charles Tillon, and treated as a 'police agent'. He saw the Liberation as a missed political opportunity for the left.

rehearsed our repertoire of revolutionary songs, from 'La Butte rouge' to 'La Semaine sanglante'. And in a vengeful chorus we shouted out 'Los de Oviedo':

Lighting the fuses of their tin grenades with their cigarettes, The men of Oviedo, with splendid spirit, threw off in a moment their chains . . .

Below Jaén, we were sure to salute deferentially the *aceituneros altivos*:

*Andaluces de Jaén, aceituneros altivos
Decidme en el alma? De quien?
De quien son esos olivos.*

On the night-time roads, Patchou took up the Piaf repertoire in her Nîmes accent and irony. As an encore, I asked her once more for 'Manon'. The old-fashioned tune plunged me back into the joyous melancholy of smoky evenings in the family bistro:

By night in Montmartre, the champagne sparkles
In the midst of songs, laughs and girls,
And suddenly all fall silent . . .

To please me, also, Patchou would follow with 'Loulou':

You know it well, Loulou,
You're far too pretty,
You love jewels,
The high life calls you.
Loulou you are too beautiful,
And I'm jealous.

On return, we dropped anchor at Pézenas, in Paul's family home at 1 rue Albert-Paul-Alliès (named after his grandfather, the historian of Molière's home town). On Sundays, the whole family would gather for an extended lunch beneath the lime trees of Le Clos de la Reine Claude, a farmhouse surrounded by vineyards on the edge of the town. These long, slow days followed a perfectly regulated ceremonial: the aperitif under the wisteria, the *petits pâtés de Pézenas* as a gastronomic opener, Lucienne's *cargolade* or *caponata*, the wines

selected by Albert, the *trou occitan* with brandy to make a pause before the *pelardons* and desserts.

Over the years, Pézenas and Le Clos became a friendly refuge. The welcome of Paul and his parents, their table always open, went far beyond generous hospitality. It was an odd combination of primitive potlatch and post-capitalist gift economy, from which monetary relations were quite absent. As in the novels of the comtesse de Ségur, the farmer left melons, tomatoes or apricots under the wisteria, depending on the season. Everyday life obeyed a ritual of sociability, diametrically opposed to the routines and automatisms of commodity culture. Every gesture was designed to seek pleasure or arouse a flavour: even the log for the open fire was chosen for the particular scent it would give off as it burned. The choice of a wine from the cellar, the fig picked just ripe from the tree to accompany the *jabougo*, the plums from the garden (the *reine-claudes* after which the farmhouse was named) – nothing was a matter of indifference. Everyday life took on the air of a permanent festival.

For more than thirty years now, we have enjoyed these precious moments, under the sign of a friendship that political disagreements and thunderous arguments at the end of the meal have not shaken, despite Paul raging like Jupiter on his domestic Olympus. Paul has a practical energy that is always in movement, a hedonistic way of living, a boundless generosity and an affectionately despotic hospitality. This is also for me a friendship sealed by an invisible pact, such as Saint-Just sought to make into a republican institution, resisting the test of discord and dispute. A 'relationship without dependency, without episodes, in which however the whole simplicity of life is involved', as Maurice Blanchot put it.

With our heads still aflame from our Iberian escapade, a brutal sobering-up awaited us in Paris. Our Argentinian comrades, imprisoned in Rawson at the tip of Patagonia, had planned a bold escape together with their fellow detainees. Carefully timed, their plan envisaged a coordinated mutiny with military support from outside. Guards had been bribed. As they emerged, lorries would be on hand to take the fugitives to the airport, where they would hijack a flight to Chile, still under the Popular Unity government. On 17 August, the plan was put into execution. It functioned in precise detail, except for one point which, as so often in operations of this kind, transformed triumph into tragedy. The lorry was late. Mario Roberto Santucho, the historic leader of the PRT, a prisoner himself and the inspiration

of the plan, 'requisitioned' a passing truck and selected half a dozen leaders from the different movements that had taken part in the escape.¹ They managed to reach Santiago, from where they could travel to Cuba.

Robi Santucho could not foresee that the seventeen comrades left behind in Rawson would be condemned. They included his own companion, Anna Maria Villareal 'Sayo', so delicate and frail, and Pedro Bonnet, a pleasant young man whom I had met in Paris in the company of Luis Pujals (murdered in 1972 in a Buenos Aires police station). On 22 August, these seventeen were killed in cold blood by agents of the dictatorship, without any form of trial, in the Trelew prison.* The Cuarteto Cedrón composed a cantata to the victims of this massacre, which had its first performance in Paris at a big meeting of the Ligue at the Palais des Sports.

Impatient to return clandestinely to Argentina after a stay in Cuba, Santucho made a stopover in Brussels. We had a long discussion with him at the home of Ernest Mandel on rue Josse-Impens.² He was a personality of magnetic force: a small forty-year-old with black hair in crow's wings, a sharp nose and a slightly Indian profile, his will tensed like a bow towards the final goal. Hailing from the sugar region of Tucumán, he moved on from revolutionary nationalism and was radicalised, like a whole Latin American generation, under the influence of the Cuban revolution and Che, whom he got to know when he first visited Cuba. A passion strong enough to move mountains emanated from him. In my imagination, as a young activist, I thought I could see the determination of Lenin, hiding in his Finland hut on the eve of the October insurrection.

And yet the meeting was disagreeable, heavy, marked by a strange unease. We discussed in a little sitting-room with furniture covered in pretty pieces of Bruges lace. On the bookshelves were serried ranks of bound volumes of *Neue Zeit*, Kautsky and Rosa Luxemburg. There was the atmosphere of a museum of the European workers' movement. Robi Santucho came from another world. He had found himself in the Fourth International almost by accident, by way of the mergers between Argentinian groups that followed an agreement with Nahuel Moreno with the aim of preparing armed struggle.[†] One

* This event came to be known as the Trelew Massacre. It marked the beginning of the practice of mass extermination of political prisoners in Argentina.

† Nahuel Moreno, 1924–87, made contact with the Trotskyist movement when still a high school student in Argentina. Participated in the leadership of numerous groups

could imagine, while we spoke, the ghosts of Sayo and her martyred comrades perched on his shoulder. He had the fixed idea of returning to his country as soon as possible to continue the struggle, perhaps in order to settle a personal account with the murderers. And we were questioning him about Fidel Castro's positions on the Prague spring and the French May events! Seen from Rawson, Prague was a long way off. To continue his war, Robi Santucho needed support from the Cubans. He also thought it possible to have the backing of the 'socialist camp'. In war as in war. For him, the world was divided into two camps, friends and enemies. Even if not everything was for the best in the best of socialist worlds, it was necessary to line up solidly with those he considered 'strategic allies'. This 'campism' with its false realism was light years away from the tradition of the Left Opposition to Stalinism. But we might well try to convince him that this short-term realism had an exorbitant price; he wouldn't listen. How many divisions has the Fourth International?

In 1981, I found the same illusory 'realism', tinged with a hint of cynicism, in connection with the Polish events. One comrade, who had been close to us during his Paris exile and was still active underground in the ranks of the Chilean MIR, explained to me his sympathy with the strikers of Gdansk. The birth of Solidarnosc brought striking justification of our criticisms of Stalinism and the bureaucratic dictatorships. But the Polish workers had 'no chance', in the world as it was, of relaunching the construction of a democratic socialism, so it was better that the Soviets should restore order as quickly as possible, to avoid seeing the 'socialist camp' weakened and divided in the face of the imperialist 'main enemy'. This was all the more urgent, according to him, as the Chilean dictatorship was showing signs of wear and tear, and popular mobilisations were rising again throughout the southern cone. This discourse, on the part of an educated and well-informed comrade, left me gasping.

There was not the least sign of cynicism on the part of Santucho. He was also occupied, moreover, with the divisions that had broken out in the ranks of the PRT. Dissent had emerged in the southern region of Buenos Aires. He probably suspected us of having taken advantage of his absence to encourage this, if not actually arouse it.

(where his faction was able to practise entryism). Opposed to the FI majority, in 1954 he co-founded the Latin American secretariat of orthodox Trotskyism. Taking part in the 1963 reunification, he split in 1979, working with the CORQI until 1982, when he founded the LIT.

Ten thousand kilometres away, the relics of the European workers' movement, the tea and biscuits, must have seemed somewhat unreal.

On 19 July 1976, Robi Santucho was killed along with his new companion, Liliana Delfino, in a military attack on a 'safe house' where he had holed up, a few days before planning to leave for Cuba. The Santucho family tree, with its dozen or so dead and 'disappeared', reads like a martyrology of the popular struggle in Argentina in the 1970s.³

In spring 1973, I campaigned for the legislative election in Toulouse, in a constituency that Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber had his eyes on.* The PCF stood René Piquet. I had known him at the time of my holidays in the Sologne, as the young federal secretary of Loire-et-Cher, with a brilliant future expected in the Party leadership.† The Ligue's candidate in an adjacent constituency was the veteran Jules Fourrier.‡ A Breton republican, staunch freethinker, house painter and libertarian trade unionist, he had joined the PCF in the early 1930s, in the midst of the 'third period', out of a taste for 'class brawling', as he put it. He was a fine embodiment of that 'bureaucratized heroism' that Isaac Deutscher wrote about. In 1936 he was elected in the Quai de Javel constituency, where the Citroën factory was located, as the youngest Communist deputy in the Front Populaire coalition. In 1937, he was André Marty's liaison agent in the International Brigades at Albacete. Disoriented by the Nazi-Soviet pact, he was one of the Communist deputies who voted full powers to Pétain.§ This stain on his 'CV' stuck to his skin like blood

* Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber, 1924–2006, an École Polytechnique student. At twenty-nine, a spokesman for Pierre Mendès-France. Founded *L'Express*, initially as a weekly supplement to *Les Échos* newspaper. Opposed to the war in Algeria, it would reach a circulation of 300,000. In 1965, tried to mount a presidential campaign for 'Mr. X' (the SFIO's Gaston Defferre). In 1967, wrote *Le Défi américain*, a best-seller for a political essay. He was the secretary of the Parti Radical 1971–79; minister of reforms for a few months in 1974.

† René Piquet, born 1932, a mechanic and member of the PCF central committee in 1961 and from 1964 to 1990, a member of its Politburo. In 1985 made responsible for training up cadre. A member of the European Parliament 1979–99, and vice president of its United European Left/Green Nordic Left grouping.

‡ Jules Fourrier, 1906–99, decorator. From 1924 a member of the CGTU, and in the PCF from 1929. Repeatedly in prison. An MP from 1936, then charged with agit-prop at the PCF cadre school. Took part in numerous supply missions to the International Brigades. Resigned from the PCF after the Nazi-Soviet pact. Active in the Union de la Gauche Socialiste, and in the PSU until 1965. Subsequently in the Toulouse Cercle Germinal, and the LCR from 1972.

§ Of the seventy-two deputies elected as Communists in 1936, the large majority who remained in the PCF after the Nazi-Soviet pact were deprived of their mandate in January 1940. Nine deputies still described as Communist, including Fourrier, voted for Pétain, four others were absent or did not vote.

on the hands of Lady Macbeth, though he very soon sought to erase it. Living with an activist from a POUM family whom he had met in Spain, he was deported to Buchenwald for Resistance activities, broke with the Party and established in the 1950s the Germinal group (a left current within the PSU). After 1968 he took part in the launch of *Secours Rouge*, then joined the LCR in 1969 as if coming home.

With his Breton accent, twinkling eyes and strong head, Jules was a real character. Our generation at this time tended to believe that election campaigns were basically fought in the media. Fourrier had been trained in the 1930s by the Party's agit-prop school, at a time when *L'Humanité* was sold in villages from a bicycle. He did not talk about activism on the ground. He called it simply 'raising dust'. He recommended us to visit every hamlet, every residential quarter, to put a couple of posters up outside the town hall or the corner bar advertising a public meeting. No more than two or three people would come, at most half a dozen. It was a start. You had to persevere. And twice as many would come the next week. Despite his bad legs, which reminded him painfully of Buchenwald, he wouldn't take the bus, but would head off from our office once a week with a bundle of leaflets under his arm, to do the letterboxes before returning home on foot. He was surprised that young activists didn't spontaneously do the same. It wasn't that complicated! Once a week! In the end, the 'dust' would pay for itself.

In the 'class brawl', every inch of ground counts.

Concorde was the big issue in the Toulouse election campaign. The PCF defended the prestige plane in the name of the expected technological advances and 'French greatness'. It wasn't yet the 'Produce French!' of sinister memory, but the tone had been given. We systematically arrived to contradict this at the meetings of Servan-Schreiber (protected by heavies of the far right) and René Piquet. Breaking the electoral truce, an exemplary strike with an elected strike committee broke out at the Ruggieri plant. Our comrades there played a leading role. Exasperated by our demands, the local Communist leaders did not even dare hold their open meetings, on the model of 'Tell me, Monsieur Marchais', which were being organised on a national scale. But when the votes were counted, our score was a meagre one.

Once the electoral page had been turned, we left by bus for Milan, where a great international demonstration in support of the Indochinese people was to be held. It took place at the Vigorelli

velodrome with its legendary wooden track, still vibrant with the exploits of the cyclists Fausto Coppi, Jacques Anquetil and Roger Rivière in their one-hour records. Preceded by a fanfare (in which Sophie joyously shook the tambourine), the Ligue's procession made a proud appearance. As it entered the velodrome to make its round, hordes of fanatical Stalino-Maoists burst down from the stands to cries of 'Viva Stalin!', clearly set on beating the Trots. That was to underestimate the *furia francese* of our stewards, resolved to avenge the memory of the victims of the Moscow trials. The affair ended in a medieval-style pitched battle with banner staffs in the middle of the grass, under the gaze of a public amazed by this unexpected spectacle.

On return to Paris, preparations for our 21 June demonstration against Ordre Nouveau's racist meeting at the Mutualité were in full swing.* There was a sulphurous smell in the air. Between one demonstration and the next, our clashes with the police became increasingly violent. The previous year, a night-time demonstration against a similar meeting at the Palais des Sports had turned to riot. To protect the distribution of leaflets at the gates of the Citroën factory in Rennes, against the toughs of the yellow house union, we had to send several vanloads of reinforcements from Paris and impose respect for trade-union democracy with Molotov cocktails. At the Nice university, there was an embryonic civil war between our activists and the local fascists. Skirmishes multiplied at the markets of Aligre and rue de la Convention in Paris. Things were escalating.

Preparations for the 21 June demo were a model of their kind. With a presentiment that it would be large but still a minority, we had stocked up some days in advance a number of Molotov cocktails and iron bars at building sites scattered across the capital. Michel Recanati, Charles Michaloux and myself were in charge of the direction of operations. On the morning of the 21st, the affair took a disturbing turn. If the Ligue was the main organising force, the initiative had brought together the various tendencies of the far left. In their warlike emulation, none of them wanted to take responsibility for a retreat. We had tried in vain to imagine a few lightning strikes that would reduce the importance of the evening demonstration.

* Ordre Nouveau: Emerged from Occident and Groupe Union Droit far-right students in 1969. Took up the strategy of building a broad party, ultimately leading to the Front National. Banned after its 1973 meeting in opposition to 'untamed immigration', which the far left tried to break up. This also led to the banning of the LC.

There were precise rendezvous for the activists of supporting cells on the Métro platforms. They had received itineraries that were detailed to the exact minute, so as to erupt in perfect synchrony outside the Mutualité. In late afternoon, the 'group leaders' met to receive final instructions. Faces were taut and rather pale. I presented a plan of biblical simplicity. According to the information of couriers charged with relaying the latest information on police deployments, we should be able to form a line of several thousand activists, all helmeted and armed with iron bars, right at the place Monge. We would charge immediately in the direction of the Mutualité. The instruction then was simply to 'hold the street until the last Métro train'. The perplexed silence and questioning glances that this harangue received spoke volumes.

This heroic charge has led to much ink being spilled over the years – perhaps too much.⁴ After the initial assault and the first wall of fire, fear had been overcome and turned to fury. Like a bursting spring, the boldness of the activists became inversely proportional to the fright that had preceded it. We had never before seen such a rush of police retreating in complete disorder, falling over one another and rolling in the gutter, with the unleashed demonstrators at their heels. While the first lines charged, mobile groups bombarded them with Molotov cocktails from the sides. Christophe Aguiton and his infantry worked wonders.' Beneath his strange helmet, Edwy Plenel had his moustache in battle order. From rabbits, we had become hunters. The line ended up ebbing back and breaking into sections. After a final rush against the police buses parked on place Edmond-Rostand, the main contingent made for the Seine and crossed by the Pont d'Austerlitz. By the time they reached the place de la Bastille, the exhausted demonstrators had lost their banners. They didn't even have the strength to shout slogans. All that could be heard was the metal scraping of iron bars on the tarmac. The final stand of this dog-tired horde descended the rue du Faubourg-Saint-Antoine towards the premises of Ordre Nouveau, which were taken by storm. Mission accomplished. Dispersal.

That evening, the debriefing meeting was jubilant, despite vague worries as to the aftermath. The very next day, after a session of the

* Christophe Aguiton, born 1953, LCR member, trade unionist (CFDT then SUD-PTT). Co-founder of AC! and ATTAC. Author of numerous works on social movements.

council of ministers, the verdict was on the front pages. The Ligue Communiste was dissolved. According to the minister of the interior Marcellin, its leaders were liable to prosecution for attempted murder of policemen. Already on suspension after a previous conviction, Pierre Rousset had been dispensed from the demo and charged with guarding our offices on the impasse Guéménée. He was arrested there during the night. It was decided that Alain Krivine would let himself be arrested after a press conference held under the protection of François Mitterrand: he would be more useful in prison than in a burdensome clandestinity. And besides, the indelible slogans, still on the tarmac from summer 1968 – ‘Free Krivine and Rousset! – would still be useful!

The twenty-first of June gave rise to many comments, as if, for want of real battles, the demonstration had acquired with the years epic proportions in the memory of well-behaved ex-militants. On the day after our dissolution, the situation was bizarre. In Argentina, our comrades had immediately organised, by way of reprisal, a machine-gun attack on the French embassy. We did feel that Marcellin’s exaggerated threats lacked political sense. The leaders of the Ligue were sought but, press freedom being sacrosanct, *Rouge* remained legal. French legislation makes it harder to ban a paper than an organisation. And so not a week went by without it appearing. It rediscovered the traditional function of the revolutionary press as ‘collective organiser’, around which groups of distributors and readers met. Alain Bobbio and myself, responsible for the publication, had found refuge in a remote corner of the 13th arrondissement, at the home of the actor Paul Crauchet who was away on a tour.* Liaison agents collected articles from dead-letter boxes. *Libération* and *Politique Hebdo* lent us their photosetting keyboards and light boxes.

Debatable from a strategic point of view, the 21 June action was rather popular in the factories. Workers are never bothered about the police getting a beating. And then, the cause – an anti-racist demonstration in defence of immigrant workers (that was only the start of a campaign by the semi-fascist far right, as we have subsequently seen) – was a legitimate one. Hundreds of celebrities, intellectuals, trade-unionists and artists signed an appeal against the dissolution of the League, which was widely published and pasted up as a poster.

* Alain Bobbio (alias Félix Lourson), born 1948, a member of the JCR and LC central committee, then in the LCR. National secretary of ANDEVA.

Despite its anti-*gauchiste* phobia, even the PCF was obliged to take up our defence and participate (in the person of Jacques Duclos!) in a solidarity meeting at the Cirque d'Hiver. A great first!

At the end of August, the Belgian comrades from Mouscron helped us cross the border to hold in Ghent the first meeting of our national leadership after the dissolution. There were joyful reunions. Some people had taken the pretext of clandestinity to grow fantastic moustaches, flowering beards, or dye their hair with henna. Presiding over the meeting, Jacques Rzepisky and Olivier Martin sported loud ties that gave them the look of Flemish pimps.* The ambiance was electric to say the least. The comrades in charge of factory work were critical of ultra-left tendencies. They believed that this misadventure would disorganise us at a crucial moment for our implantation in the working class. The three of us who had been directly responsible for 21 June, Recanati, Michaloux and myself, were little inclined to self-criticism. We had received unexpected backing from our elders: Pierre Frank, who had always maintained an affectionate admiration for Auguste Blanqui, and Michel Lequenne, for whom the many demonstrations of solidarity with the Ligue justified a posteriori our military side-slip.†

Marcellin had counted on the Ligue experiencing the same fate as the Maoists of *La Cause du Peuple*, who had never recovered from their dissolution in 1970. That was a failure of judgement, a

* Olivier Martin (alias Olive), on the central committee of the LCR, in charge of its *service d'ordre*, electoral campaigns (seeking nominations, registration drives), the distribution of *Rouge* and so on. Worked as an actor with Romain Goupil. Now a member of Gauche Anticapitaliste.

† Pierre Frank, 1905–84, one of the early French Left Oppositionists, worked in Trotsky's secretariat on the island of Prinkipo. Returning to France, he was a leader of the LC through the 1930s. At the end of the 'French turn' (of Trotskyists working in the SFIO), Frank was in the minority alongside Raymond Molinier who refused to leave, setting up a separate Trotskyist group within that party and publishing the paper *La Commune*. Interned in Britain during WWII, he returned to France in 1944 to take part in the reunification of three of the four Trotskyist currents. A consistent member of the international leadership of the FI and USFI from 1948 onwards, he worked as an editor of Intercontinental Press and authored *The Long March of the Trotskyists*.

Michel Lequenne (Ramos, Hoffmann), born in Le Havre in 1921 to a humble family. Employed as a cotton trader than as a building worker after the Liberation, he began to work in publishing in 1947, as a typesetter. A member of the October group from 1943, then the unified PCI in 1944. He was hostile to Pabloism from 1952, and expelled from the majority PCI in 1955 along with Bleibtreu. Joining the PSU in 1960, he was the driving force behind the revolutionary socialist tendency and in 1961 joined the minority PCI. He was a member of its politburo until 1968. A member of the LC/LCR from its creation until 1988, a member of its central committee, and a protagonist of its Tendence 3.

misunderstanding of our social base and the reality of the balance of forces. We were less isolated than he believed. In September, Krivine and Rousset were released. The vicissitudes that this episode of semi-clandestinity involved certainly complicated our life a bit, but not too seriously.

Except for Michel Recanati.

Sought as the person chiefly responsible for 21 June, 'Ludo' gave himself up to the police in autumn after a short stay abroad. The liberation of Krivine and Rousset let him hope for a relatively brief stay in the Santé, which was better than sinking into a spiral of clandestinity with an uncertain outcome. His spell in prison provided the occasion for him to weigh the balance of his young life and confront his intimate wounds. He had recently learned that the man whom he had always taken for his father, and admired, was not his actual father. He revised the scenario of his childhood and adolescence in the light of this revelation. During our time in hiding, we had discussed a lot of things, but he did not want to discuss this thorny subject. He had simply mentioned it one evening when we were having dinner at a Russian restaurant in Clignancourt, talking about a love affair in Russia. I never knew if this was a fable designed to test our reactions, or a genuine trauma: he was talking about his own abandonment by his biological father.

When he was released from prison, Ludo had changed. A few months later, he came to see me, both as a friend and as the person in charge of security matters. He had just started psychoanalysis, and felt obliged to take indefinite 'organisational leave'. I tried in vain to dissuade him, advising him to take time out to breathe without making a break, to look after himself and work at the new choice of profession that he had in mind. But Ludo lived the life of a soldier monk. Meticulous, and conscientious to the extreme, he would sometimes vomit nervously before leaving for a demonstration or the start of a meeting. He had the feeling that by confiding in a psychoanalyst he was betraying our secrets, and felt an irrepressible guilt. His cure was blocked.

He took his distance. His appearances became increasingly rare. He no longer replied to invitations, or suggestions that we go out somewhere together. He fled from discussion, and eventually disappeared. We only learned of his suicide, in 1979, a long time after. Ludo had been first and foremost a man of action, intelligent, charismatic, tough and fragile at the same time. A deep wound was

apparent in his broken laughter or tight smile, as if he was displacing a sign of weakness. Through Romain Goupil's film, *Mourir à trente ans*, his suicide is often perceived as the symbol of a generational tragedy, and a decisive end to a period in which history was breathing down our necks. Does anyone know how many different paths – crossed, knotted, broken – lead to suicide? Can this moment of extreme decisions, the singular dénouement to a unique history, ever be reduced to a simple causal chain or the edifying illustration of a collective adventure?

Goupil's film is validated by the spontaneity of its amateur images, the authenticity of youth, and above all, the presence of Michel himself. Reality went beyond fiction. Like the fresco of Hamon and Rotman, however, it produces a narcissistic magnifying effect on the microcosm of political militancy. History then appears as a tragic game of farce and trickery for a band of adolescents kicking against their entry into real life. A number of disenchanted ex-activists recognised themselves in the grating nostalgia of Olivier and Jean Rolin's tales. And yet, it wasn't 'just for a laugh', as kids say. At least, not for everyone. Ludo, for his part, took things terribly seriously. During the summer of 1972, he acquired the habit of asking, in an outbreak of almost immediately stifled laughter, 'What's it all for?' This became a kind of complicit password, a simulacrum of ironic distance, indicating that we were doing seriously what we believed we had to do, without however taking ourselves (too) seriously; and that we were well aware of the parody aspect of our remakes of *L'Affiche Rouge*.

'What's it all for?' It is clear after the event that Ludo didn't ask (or ask himself) the question just ironically. It had begun to haunt him for real. The 'absent pillar' that he had built his young and fleeting life around was wobbling dangerously.

Compared with previous generations, the trials we experienced – at least in France – were minor. And yet we had embarked, particularly through our international ties, on a common adventure with our Basque, Bolivian, Chilean, Argentinian, Mexican and Brazilian comrades. Many of them have not survived. I can recall dozens of faces suddenly obliterated. We owe these departed faces the loyalty that Karol Modzelewski demanded towards those unknown to whom the debt is unpayable. To keep faith with them, out of respect to ourselves. Nothing is more disgusting than those photos, taken at commemorative banquets or Socialist Party congresses, where a handful of satisfied veterans raise their fists and sing the 'Internationale'

or 'La Jeune Garde' in a derisory way. As if to say: 'We were young. But we had a good time.' Or again: 'We were all wrong, but how well we've done.'

It's *Nous nous sommes tant aimés*, in the version of an ageing Narcissus . . .

But the farce was not the same for everyone. It also had its dupes.

'You can laugh at everything, but not with everyone,' as Pierre Deprogres said.*

That same year, 1973, François Maspero also attempted suicide.

* Pierre Desproges, 1939–88, anti-conformist comic, employing offbeat and absurd jokes and making use of derision and dark humour. Writer for *l'Aurore* and the satirical *Charlie Hebdo*, appearing on TV in TFI's *Le Petit rapporteur*, France-Inter's *Tribunal des flagrants délires* and FR3's *La Minute nécessaire de Monsieur Cyclopède*.

Crying for Argentina

It is gentleness that makes all prophets violent.

– André Suarès, *Idées et Visions*

The 10th World Congress of the Fourth International was held in January 1974 by a rainy Rimini beach. Controversy raged over the outcome of the armed struggle in Latin America, over the imminence of revolution in Europe, and over a Basque commando's execution of Carrero Blanco, Franco's appointed successor. Two blocs had formed. The majority included most of the European sections and some of the Latin American ones; the minority was grouped around the US Socialist Workers' Party and the Argentinian Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores led by Hugo Bressano, known as Nahuel Moreno. In the course of the preparatory discussion, each current was allowed by the statutes to present its positions to the various sections. Thanks to *L'Espagnol en 90 leçons*, *Siete domingos rojos* and the comic strip *Mafalda*, I could get by in Spanish. And so I was sent to Argentina to defend our position.

Argentina counted for much in the history of Latin American Trotskyism. After the War, two opposing currents came into being. That of Juan Posadas saw Perón's popular nationalism as a progressive development.* That of Nahuel Moreno, on the other hand, viewed Peronism as a kind of pre-fascism specific to an underdeveloped country. Following the overthrow of Perón in 1955, the Posadist tendency took a strange turn. Its guru ended up in the 1960s developing positions

* Juan Posadas (Homero Romulo Cristalli Frasnelli), 1912–81, footballer and then trade-union leader from Argentina. In 1947 organised a Fourth International group and engaged in an intricate analysis of Peronism. Founded the Partido Obrero Revolucionario (Trotskista) section of the Fourth International, in 1951, and the so-called Latin American bureau. Broke in 1962 to create a Fourth International (Posadist). Wrote on the possibility of flying saucers bringing socialism to Earth from workers' states in other galaxies, as well as on human dialogue with dolphins.

closer to Dalí's critical paranoia than to the theory of permanent revolution. Moreno, however, reversed his earlier positions and linked up with the Peronist resistance. He understood the impact of the Cuban revolution, and planned in the early 1960s to commit his organisation to armed struggle. With this perspective he undertook a rapprochement with the Tucumán group led by Mario Roberto Santucho. This gave birth to the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (PRT) – an inopportune development.

From 1965, when US marines landed in the Dominican Republic, the tide began to turn. The death of Che in 1967, and the defeat of the guerrilla movements in Peru, Colombia and Guatemala, led Moreno to the conclusion that a new direction was required. Santucho, though, persevered with the original project. Thus, at the 9th World Congress in 1969, two delegations represented the PRT: the PRT-Combatiente of Santucho, on the one hand, and Moreno's PRT-La Verdad on the other. A few weeks after the congress, the urban uprisings of the *cordobaço* and *rosariaço* erupted in Argentina. The town of Córdoba was a stronghold of the PRT-Combatiente, but the PRT-La Verdad was also firmly anchored there in the trade unions: its candidate in the 1973 presidential election had been a Córdoba worker in the auto industry. Moreno argued on the basis of these urban explosions for a return to the classical forms of strike and urban uprising, against a fetishism of the rural guerrilla inspired by the Cuban revolution (or its legend). Santucho deduced from it the need to strengthen military preparation with the perspective of transforming these spontaneous struggles into organised insurrectionary movements.

Thirty years and a hecatomb later, this controversy can well appear insignificant. At the time, however, this was not at all the case. Between 1970 and 1973, the southern cone of Latin America was in constant eruption. Chile was governed by the Popular Unity coalition of Salvador Allende. In Uruguay, the Tupamaros struck ever more frequent blows. In Bolivia, military coups d'état alternated with uprisings of miners supported by the powerful trade-union federation. Thousands of lives were at stake. The Chilean tragedy, the thirty thousand 'disappeared' in Argentina and the Uruguayan jails are the sorry proof of this. In the space of a few weeks, between June and September 1973, military dictatorship was imposed in both Uruguay and Chile. The painful experience of the 'Chilean road' was on everyone's mind.

Argentina was distinguished by a tradition of extreme social violence, by the existence of a workers' movement under Peronist hegemony, by the activity of significant left-Peronist armed currents (such as the

Montoneros) and by the presence of a revolutionary left influenced by Castroism. An essay by Ernest Mandel emphasised the structural weaknesses of the dependent national bourgeoisies on the continent, deducing an almost immediate organic relationship between the democratic tasks of the revolution and its socialist dynamic. This underestimated the fact that the fragility of the ruling classes was echoed by a symmetrical weakness of the dominated, marshalled more durably and more solidly than we had imagined by nationalist and Peronist formations. The ability of Peronism to survive, despite the worst compromises and pervasive corruption, never stopped astonishing us.

When I landed in Buenos Aires in October 1973, the continent was still under the shock of Pinochet's coup d'état, the fall of the Moneda and the suicide of Salvador Allende. In Argentina itself, the situation was paradoxical. A year before, the military dictatorship had been swept away by popular mobilisation. President Cámpora held his office provisionally, awaiting the triumphant return of Perón. The country was marked by an extraordinary freedom of movement, expression and assembly. The kiosks were full of publications with red covers. Che's portrait could be seen everywhere. At the cross-road of Callao and Corrientes, you met all kinds of figures of continental subversion: Brazilians awaiting the fall of their own dictatorship, Bolivian conspirators in transit, Uruguayans who had come for a neighbourly visit, Chilean refugees who did not yet imagine that their exile would be so long, a few Paraguayans with their maté kits. And yet the press reported a daily violence – armed ambushes, *tirroteos*, kidnappings and ransom demands. To distribute a leaflet at a factory gate, you often needed cumbersome armed protection, as much against trigger-happy union bureaucrats as against the police.

The delegation responsible for presenting the majority positions of the International were a picturesque team. Hedda Garza, a Jewish New Yorker in her forties, made an impact wherever she went, with her eccentric hats, variegated make-up and minimalist skirts.* Her

* Hedda Garza (née Axelrod), 1929–95, was born into a Russian Jewish family in New York City who were members of the Communist Party. Garza joined the Labor Youth League, the CP's youth group, as a teenager, but broke with the CP after the Khrushchev revelations. She joined the SWP in 1958, and was a candidate for public office and a public spokesperson for the SWP in the anti-Vietnam war movement in the 1960s and 1970s. She was expelled, along with nearly 150 others, as part of a pro-FI majority tendency in the SWP in July 1974. A professional indexer, she produced the first comprehensive index for the Watergate hearings, as well as a number of books for young adult readers, including biographies of Trotsky and Kahlo.

Yankee exuberance invariably led to our being cheated by taxi-drivers, which we didn't dare protest – discretion was the rule. Meeting with underground comrades, we could not draw attention to ourselves because of a foolish incident. Our third member, Ramiro del Valle, was a brilliant Mexican linguist and imperturbably calm.*

My first visit was to the comrades of the 'red faction' of the PRT-Combatiente. These dissenters had been expelled by Santucho when he returned to Argentina. The disagreement with them involved points of orientation and operation as well as international questions. They were present mainly in the southern district of Buenos Aires, and their new grouping sought both to display its loyalty to the Fourth International and to demonstrate that it was capable, in terms of armed struggle, of rivalling the courage and determination of the historic PRT, then at the peak of its strength. After building up a nice little nest-egg thanks to a number of successful *secuestros* (kidnappings), our comrades had just printed several thousand copies of a bulky number of their new magazine, *Cuarta Internacional*, proudly titled '*Si, trotskistas!*' with the intention of challenging the witch-hunts orchestrated both by the vintage Stalinists and by an anti-Trotskyism spread in an underhand way by the Cuban leaders. At the time I arrived, this magazine was prominently displayed in all the kiosks.

The leadership of the 'red faction' was partly made up of Brazilians who had joined the Ligue Communiste during their French exile: Paulo Antonio Paranagua, the young Nanterre surrealist who had become after May 68 the inspiration of our cell at Renault-Billancourt, his companion Maria-Regina ('Neneca'), and Flavio Koutzii known as René.¹ In 1971, this group of exiles were planning their return to Brazil in order to build up an organisation there. The first to return, Luiz Eduardo Merlino, was arrested and murdered the day after his arrival.[†] The others then had to scatter, some to Chile under the

* Jorge del Valle (Ramiro), member from 1968 and then leading member of the GCI (Grupo Comunista Internacionalista), Mexican section of the FI. Broke from the GCI in 1974 and in 1994 participated in the negotiations between the government and the Zapatistas. University professor at UNAM in Mexico City.

† Luiz Eduardo Merlino was born in Brazil in 1948. A college student activist and journalist within the Popular Centre for Culture (Centro Popular de Cultura – CPC), essentially the propaganda and popular art division of the UNE. He worked as a journalist on *La Folha da Tarde* in 1968, and the *Jornal do Bairro* in 1969–70. By this time he had joined the POC, which, after the military repression against the student movement intensified in 1968, had formed a militia, part of the increasingly militarised left-wing revolutionary movement in Brazil. In 1971, he travelled to France, where he established contacts with the reunified Fourth International, as part of a POC effort to link with international

Popular Unity government, others to Argentina, where they acquired military experience with their sister section.

One fine morning, then, I turned up at daybreak in a strange family boarding-house, where Paulo and Neneca rented a room under the pretext of being innocent foreign students. Despite the early hour, Paulo had already left on the warpath, and over breakfast Neneca brightly informed me of their latest adventures, punctuating her account with a communicative *joie de vivre*. It was she who steered me to student meetings in La Plata, where everyone was armed to the teeth. Neneca was no killer, simply a student who might have been tranquilly bronzing on the beaches of Leblon while sipping *batidas de melão*. But she had landed in this pit amid the wild beasts. She held her place bravely, through arrest, prison and torture, returning with a laugh that never faltered.

In the course of a month, I was able to visit all the cells of the 'red faction'. Frustrated by a lack of information resulting from tight security, the comrades were eager for information on the European situation, for theoretical discussions and details of our epic of 21 June. They had acquired the worrying habit of recording meetings so as to distribute cassettes to absent comrades and members of the apparatus unable to attend for security reasons. These tapes cost them dear at the time of the 1975 arrests.

At La Plata, Buenos Aires or Córdoba, meetings began with a distribution of weapons and ammunition against the possibility of a hostile intrusion. While maté was prepared, a responsible comrade explained the evacuation plan. I would double-check that my safety-catch functioned properly, praying to the proletarian fairy godmother that the appearance of a postman's cap would not trigger a deadly civil war. We had to drive for hours around interminable suburbs, in covered trucks, before being able to slip into safe houses, some of

Trotskyism, as they had been founded as explicitly anti-Stalinist, but without any historic or organic connection with Trotskyism. (According to the reunified Fourth International communiqué denouncing his murder, signed by Alain Krivine, he was a member, but the POC had been an observer of the Congress, so his membership is unclear.) Shortly after his return to Brazil, on 15 July 1971, he was disappeared, tortured for twenty-four hours, and then murdered, his body dropped on a roadway on or shortly before 19 July 1971. His murder shook the POC, but had a wider impact in the emerging left, as he had been, by virtue of his journalism, a fixture of the student resistance from a revolutionary socialist and communist perspective. Thus, he became a symbol of the disappeared, and today the Colectivo Merlino remains an active part of the disappeared activist scene, keeping his memory alive.

which were equipped with a 'people's prison'. Our comrades were young and intrepid, full of confidence in the socialist future of humanity. Three years later, half of the people I met at these meetings had been arrested, tortured and murdered.

It was clear that we were on a wrong path. There was too great a gap between legal activity on the one hand and underground conspiracy on the other. The country's situation might well be fragile, unstable and uncertain. It was possible, however, to take advantage of the democratic opening, however ephemeral this was, to build up forces, while prudently maintaining an apparatus that would make it possible to return to clandestinity if the need arose. Moreno's party, under the new name of Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores (PST), had opened public offices and was recruiting widely. At Mar del Plata, young fishermen proudly took me to visit, in the port district, the little wooden hut boasting the party symbol that served as their premises. At the central headquarters in Buenos Aires, Moreno showed me, behind his chair, the impact of shots fired from the street (rather like those that crisscrossed Trotsky's bedroom in Coyoacán), and the balcony wall built up as protection after this aggression.

The *plenaria* of the PST, in preparation for the World Congress, assembled at least a thousand activists in Buenos Aires. Moreno insisted that we count those present together, so as to sign a report in proper form. I was annoyed by such paper formalities between comrades, but he insisted, citing the bad tricks that European *tramposos* had played on him. I had to accept this formal report before the discussion could begin. Indeed, rather than discussion, this was more of a trial, if not rather like a B-movie. A woman comrade flung a mysterious package from the speaker's tribune, which contained a complete collection of *Rouge*. She launched into a violent theatrical diatribe, accusing the French comrades of playing Robin Hood on 21 June, while having done nothing for the defence of immigrant workers or against French colonialism in the Caribbean. This demagogic harangue raised my hackles. We had been active in the Sonacotra hostels, and had just led a campaign against the repression of Caribbean school students. I opened the package of papers, and easily found the articles in question. I ran up the steps, brandishing them under the nose of impassive participants, but their fervent nationalism closed their minds to this 'student from the Latin Quarter' who had come to give lessons in the colonies.

In Córdoba, things were even worse. A leader of the 'red faction', who according to rumour was one of the leading lights in the kidnapping and execution of the director of Fiat Argentina, proposed to accompany me. Córdoba, he claimed, was the Wild West. The PRT was well established there, and the scars left by the split were still sore. A visit here by a representative of the International was not without its dangers. This comrade was one of the most wanted men in the country, and we had taken separate flights. I waited for him in the airport cafeteria. When he appeared on the steps from the following flight, I had the impression of being in a remake of Costa-Gavras's *State of Siege*, showing at this very time in Argentine cinemas – blue blazer, smoked Ray-Bans, a watchful expression and suspicious bulges under his jacket. He had brought along a couple of *fierros* to escort me to the office of the PST, where the meeting was to be held. I was received very icily by the local dignitaries. They started by expressing astonishment at the presence beside me of an unknown 'provocateur' (*sic*). I argued that he was a member of the International just as they were, and would attend the meeting without intervening. But they were unshakeable: rather cancel the meeting than give in. I was equally reluctant to back down. The situation was a stalemate, and I risked having travelled ten thousand kilometres for nothing. The comrade extricated me from this embarrassing situation by courteously offering to go and wait for me as long as was needed at a local café – along with his guns.

The debate was a nightmare. Two hundred activists explained to me that what they needed was not alms (the PRT gave out milk and blankets at workers' hostels) but trade unions. As in a quiz show, a long table was laid out, piled high with the complete works of Trotsky. Following each of my interventions, half a dozen specialists would plunge feverishly into the magic books to hunt out a killing quote or a useful crib for the next intervention. The worst of it was that I was suffering from terrible stomach ache (whether due to food or stress). Concerned not to lose face, I was reluctant to ask for a break to go to the toilet. So I spent three interminable hours twisting and turning, leant uncomfortably against the back of my chair. The organiser of this memorable session, a certain César, was killed two years later as he left a meeting.²

My evening in Córdoba was scarcely any more successful. There were scarcely half a dozen comrades of the 'red faction' in the city, eager for discussion and enthusiastic at my arrival. We spent the whole night talking in a distant suburban villa. The dispute was over

strategy. They were convinced that the Algerian FLN had won a military victory, and championed a project of protracted people's war after the Vietnamese model rather than the Cuban. I did my best to puncture their illusions, explaining that the Algerian war of liberation had been a political victory despite military defeat, but they would not listen. At the break of day we heard a suspicious engine noise, which turned out to be a road-sweeping truck. We were immediately on a war footing, ready to fight. It would have taken no more than a stupid mistake for the night to have ended in bloodshed.

These almost ridiculous adventures, however, were the froth on a serious matter. Santucho's PRT had made use of the democratic opening to develop certain legal or semi-legal activities. But if it saw itself as being in a state of truce with the police (mainly Peronist), it was still in a state of war with the army of the coup d'état. The reasoning (inspired by precedents in Guatemala and the Dominican Republic) was that a revolutionary situation in Argentina would be immediately faced with direct American intervention (the Chilean example was close at hand!). The PRT therefore saw the struggle as an anticipatory war of national liberation. Hence a double symbolic reference, to José Martí for national liberation and Che for social liberation. But struggle against an actual occupier is one thing; it is something else completely to declare war on the national army of a state that currently exists in the name of resistance to a hypothetical future occupation.

We were running headlong into an open grave. Our comrades in the 'red faction' wanted to equal the PRT militarily, but their resources were far more modest and they did not have behind them the same international logistics. They set out to prove that the disagreement that had led them to break was not about armed struggle, which was always viewed as the principal line of difference between reformists and revolutionaries. The chronicle of a suicide foretold! In less than three years, the group had been decimated. Practically all of its leadership were arrested. The portraits of our comrades as foreign (Brazilian) terrorists, with haggard features, straggly beards and long hair, appeared on the front pages of the newspapers. On anthropometric photos, the women – buxom Nora and joyful Neneca – had hair in disarray, hollow eyes, the wild faces of viragos or Communard *pétroleuses*. The survivors sought to make a fresh start. Paulo turned the page to devote himself to journalism and the cinema. Neneca lived in the outskirts of Porto Alegre with half a dozen cats. Her smile was always as radiant, but not so her heart. Flavio, who came out of

prison as skeletal as someone released from concentration camp, slowly recovered at the cost of a long period of mourning. Despite his 'pangs of death in the heart',³ he was one of the few to maintain an active political commitment, in the ranks of the Brazilian Workers' Party.

As late as 1985, the Argentinian tragedy claimed a further victim in this small circle of Brazilians. I had met Celso Castro in Buenos Aires in 1973.^{*} In the middle of that decade, after experiencing the successive coups d'état in Brazil, Chile and Argentina, he arrived in France where he joined the technical staff of the Ligue Communiste. Returning home after remarkable adventures in Venezuela (where he came across Pierre Goldmann), I met him again in São Paulo when I visited for the first time in 1980. We spent long evenings in the bars of Pinheiros, drinking *caipirinhas* and conjuring up the old days – not such good ones. More than once, I saw him disappear down the street of la Consolação (!), with his great body, swaying gait and thick cough. In Porto Alegre in 1985, in broad daylight, he and a companion broke into the home of a former Paraguayan consul of German origin, with a known Nazi past. Neighbours alerted the police. Celso and his friend killed the consul and his wife. Then, following a pact they had made in advance, they shot themselves rather than go to prison. A police operation disguised as suicide was suspected. But Celso's closest friends were convinced that the official version was correct. As Flavio told me, it was as if someone who had been struck on the head by an atom bomb in Argentina in 1975 had died of this some ten years later in Brazil. Perhaps Celso never managed to free himself of the sense of guilt for having, unlike so many others, escaped torture and death.

So many faces wiped out.

So many laughs extinguished.

So many hopes massacred.

The Argentinian episode, testing as it was at the time, remains in retrospect a saddening experience. As underground organisations

* Celso Afonso Gay de Castro, born 1943 in Brazil. He was a militant in the POC, and after the Luiz Merino murder, exiled in Chile, and when the coup happened, in Argentina along with a number of other POC comrades. There, he became close to the 'red faction' of the PRT-Combatiente. After surviving capture and torture, he returned to Brazil, where the incident recounted here happened. The consul in question is Rudolf Goldbeck, who was indeed a former Nazi. Castro's daughter, Flavia Castro, made a documentary about him and about her search for his history in 2010, *Diário de Uma Busca*. Bensaïd appears in this documentary, with a version of the story told here, as well as further commentary on Castro.

respected a kind of curfew, I spent the greater part of my evenings alone. When night fell, the shutters came down and each person was at home, you didn't know where. I was staying with activists from the Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores who hardly spoke to me. I dined on a piece of cheese washed down with *dulce de leche*. I had plenty of time to get to know the music of Astor Piazzola and Gato Barbieri, the classic tangos of Homero Manzi and Anibal Troilo, and to celebrate the hits – *Mi Buenos Aires querida*, naturally without the least touch of irony – of my compatriot Carlos Gardel (it piqued the chauvinism of my hosts that their idol was born in Toulouse!).

But there were some bright spots in this morbid greyness. Among the tangled branches of the divided Argentinian Trotskyists, a Revolutionary Workers' Group (GOR) split away from the trunk of the PRT, inspired by 'Che' Daniel Pereyra, delegate of the PRT-Combatiente to the 9th World Congress.⁴ This former metal-worker, with blue eyes and a charming flirtatiousness, was already a legend. In the 1960s, Moreno had sent him to Peru to look after the material and financial supplies of a projected insurrection under the aegis of Hugo Blanco, who had joined the Trotskyist movement in Argentina in the 1950s and enjoyed great popularity among the peasants of the valley of la Convención.* Daniel had been arrested and imprisoned after a series of successful expropriations.⁵ After his release, he returned to Argentina in 1967, at the time of the break between Moreno and Santucho. He was then one of the 'old' Trotskyists (quite young, actually) who remained with the PRT-Combatiente. His indomitable cheerfulness, politeness, humour and chivalrous elegance did more than a little in winning our support for the armed-struggle orientation.

To the extent that Santucho's strategic intentions became more precise, new divergences arose. It was no longer simply a question of an abstract principle in favour of armed struggle, conceived as the absolute dividing line between revolutionaries and reformists and the logical conclusion of Che's final injunction – 'the duty of every revolutionary is to make the revolution' – but rather of translating this general position into concrete strategy. The schema developed by Santucho was inspired by the Vietnamese theories of protracted people's war, rather than Guevara's

* Hugo Blanco, born 1934, Peruvian. Studied agricultural science in Argentina, then worked in a factory and was active in the POR (the FI section). In Peru he was active in the newspaper sellers' trade union then, as a farmer, in the peasants' union. He led an armed rebellion in the Cuzco region in the 1960s, and was sentenced to twenty-five years' imprisonment. Expelled to Chile, he was then in exile in various countries. Co-founder of the Peruvian PRT. An MP and senator for the Mariategui Party.

foquismo. The creation of a Revolutionary People's Army (ERP), the project of liberated territories (in the rebel region of Tucumán), the attacks on barracks in the very centre of Buenos Aires to obtain heavy weapons, were all part of this perspective.⁶ A *porteno* [native of Buenos Aires] to the tips of his toes, Pereyra was very much a town rat rather than a country one. Unconvinced by this prodigious plan, he formed the GOR along with a few other comrades.

This group's ambitions were quite modest. Its leaders did not dream of launching an assault on the Winter Palace. They were satisfied with holding a modest place in a struggle in which they were no more than a small cog. The GOR limited its activity to armed propaganda: protecting interventions at the factory gate, expropriations designed to provide for the financial and logistic needs of the group (life underground is expensive), etc. The kidnapping of the head psychiatrist in the top-security division of the prison of Villa Devoto was one of their major armed exploits. The psychiatric treatment of prisoners was in fact close to torture. This psychiatrist's confession was recorded, and made a considerable impact when it was published as a short book. The mind-killer was then released unharmed, as if to cock a snook at the prison authorities.

The three leading figures in the GOR had their headquarters in an ostensible toyshop. Behind a shop-window encrusted with dirt, a dusty electric train ran in an endless loop. This business was only a cover, a fragile one as it proved. There was little in the way of rocking horses, teddy bears or tin drums. In the basement, a metal workshop was equipped with the tools needed to convert regular weapons into automatic ones complete with silencers. The comrades lived frugally. At mealtimes, Daniel or Nestor would go out to buy a pizza and a bottle of Chilean wine in honour of the French visitor – a companionship over anchovies and olives. These were the most pleasant moments of my Argentinian expedition.

A few months later, Nestor, a small man with a myopic expression, and a highly sensitive poet, hanged himself in his prison cell.* Daniel

* Rafael Lasala (Nestor): a GOR militant and a member of its secretariat, a notary by profession. Delegate to the 10th World Congress of the FI. Pseudonyms: Eloy or Nestor. Imprisoned 9 August 1974, he passed through various jails. In June 1976, under the Videla regime, he was moved to the Unidad-9 prison in La Plata, where, on 29 August he was found dead in his cell, hanged, after two years' incarceration. The jail claimed suicide, which seems dubious as he was subject to a very tough prison regime. Found on his person was a message that was meant to be sent to the organisation – this could have been the reason for his death.

once again escaped the dictatorship. He lives today in Madrid, where he published a book on the armed struggle in Latin America.* He's in good shape, mentally and physically. As dynamic and active as ever, he lived through the disappointing years of post-Francoism without giving in, attentive to the least resurgence of hope, faithful to his commitments, his companions, and his dead friends.

Hasta siempre, 'Che' Pereyra!

In the course of my Argentinian home-stays, I had a rendezvous in a dark back room with Raymond Molinier, another legend of the Trotskyist movement. His whole life was like a novel. Ever present in the quarrels and splits of the Left Opposition of the 1930s, he seemed to have disappeared in Latin America after the Second World War. The historian Pierre Broué wrote that he left Lisbon for an unknown destination, attached to a travelling circus. People thought he was dead, confusing him perhaps with his brother Henri, who fell during the liberation of Paris. Raymond re-surfaced at the 1969 World Congress in Rimini, as a member of the Uruguayan delegation. When a young Spanish comrade, adept in Trotskyist archaeology, spoke of the amazing life of a certain Molinier who had disappeared without trace, an elderly gentleman of distinguished appearance introduced himself: 'I am Molinier.' It was as though a ghost had appeared on the stroke of midnight.

The following summer we spent several days at the home of the March family, in Foxa close to Gerona. One day, coming back from the beach, a neighbour informed us that our uncle Raymond had come to visit. Distrust! Spain was still under the dictatorship, and we couldn't think what uncle this might be. The following day, an old jalopy drove up the dirt road in a cloud of dust: Molinier! He had taken a temporary job with an estate agent on the Costa Brava. His work consisted in distributing brochures on the beaches for the sale of seaside apartments. This gave him access to a duplicating machine, a real godsend in Franco's Spain, where such machines were not only scarce, but often also subject to raids.

Raymond had obtained our address from Pierre Frank, who spent his holidays at Collioure. Molinier's pitiless comment on this old Bolshevik was: 'When you're tired, you sleep! Does the bourgeoisie suspend the class struggle to take holidays?' He offered his services to

* Daniel Pereyra, *Del Moncada a Chiapas, Historia de la lucha armada en America Latina* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Canguro, 2000).

our Spanish section – though ‘section’ was rather too grand a word. The tiny circle of activists then counted no more than a few dozen stalwarts. Before going back to Argentina, Raymond ‘expropriated’ his employer’s duplicator and presented it to the Catalan comrades.

Before he left, he made a mysterious rendezvous with Robert March and me, at sunset in the little port of Sa Riera. Leaning against a boat, he carefully took off his shoe, unscrewed the heel, and extracted like a precious relic a sheet of onionskin paper that was carefully folded. This was one of the last letters from the Old Man, by way of reconciliation, shortly before his death, with those whom he called his ‘nephews’, the turbulent Frank and Molinier. Robert and I, who knew little about the factional struggles of the prewar period, were unaware of the excommunication pronounced on these two comrades. Raymond, for his part, was convinced that this document amounted to absolution and rehabilitation. He devotedly replaced it in the heel of his shoe.

In Argentina, Molinier became in the early 1970s Santucho’s trusted confidante. Under a false identity as a French engineer living in Montevideo, he took the underground publications of the PRT to the airport at Ezeiza, concealed in giant Easter eggs. He also brought in from Santiago fresh funds for Santucho after his escape from Rawson. When questioned by the Chilean customs over an attaché case stuffed with dollars and pesos, he explained confidentially: ‘You can phone President Allende about it’ (he did know Allende personally). In autumn 1973 he founded his own group, and had an office at the back of a disreputable café, where he received his handful of fellow conspirators and distributed his newssheet *Patria socialista*. This cosmopolitan buccaneer, a veteran of countless defeated conspiracies, made a curious Argentinian patriot.

With Molinier, reality always went beyond fiction. He turned up where he was least expected. It was hard to follow the drift of his stories, full of astonishing coincidences. One might believe he was making things up, until a precise detail would confirm his unlikely tale. Before the War, he and Frank had turned to embezzlement to assure the organisation’s supplies. The famous circus with which he had left Lisbon was an escape route for wanted *résistants*. His former French companion was living in Argentina with one of the Nazi butchers of Oradour. His young German companion (over seventy, Raymond was still an impenitent seducer), the daughter of worthy Lutheran pastors who were greatly surprised to discover such a

'son-in-law', was kidnapped and murdered by the Argentinian army. In the late 1980s, after the fall of the dictatorship, he was able to collect her martyred body, minus eyeballs. He claimed to have deposited valuable archives before the War at the Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, something we believed imaginary until they re-emerged one day from the vaults, where they had been forgotten for some forty years. Leafing through a magazine in the course of a trans-Atlantic crossing, he had the idea one day of organising an import-export business in llama skin, bought wholesale from Peruvian cooperatives and sold at high prices in the boutiques of Saint-Germain-des-Près (for the profit of the cause, of course). On his return to France, aged close to eighty, he acquired a full protective helmet so as to take part in the heroic assaults of the Ligue Communiste's *service d'ordre*. Somewhat short of breath, he was left behind when the procession accelerated. He then took the Métro to catch up with the head of the march a couple of stations further on. He even acted as intermediary in the purchase of a number of Renaissance châteaux by Arab princes, dismantled stone by stone and shipped overseas, in a Middle Eastern version of René Clair's *The Ghost Goes West*.

Between revolution and adventure, conspiracy and crime, Molinier's life was a novel with many scenes and timeframes, full of double agents and false passports. The most amazing part of it was that he never lost himself in the labyrinths of his making, and remained faithful to the cause in both good times and bad. He died in poverty, without the slightest trace of wealth or personal comfort.

My return to Paris in 1973, like my stay in Argentina, was a kind of grotesque coup de grâce. When I boarded the plane, I noticed Jean-Edern Hallier.* We had been slightly acquainted after 1968. He came and sat beside me. Seventeen hours aboard, including stops at Rio and Lisbon, next to this hysteric! Terrorised by each take-off and landing, he gave himself courage by downing a rapid succession of whiskies, which inflamed his libidinous coarseness towards the female stewards. An inveterate megalomaniac, he claimed that Europe was an exhausted continent, nothing interesting happened there any longer, he'd been sent by an evening paper to report on Latin America, he'd just been

* Jean-Edern Hallier, 1936–97, literary critic, polemicist and journalist. Head of the journal *Tel Quel* from 1960, and established the paper *L'Idiot International* in 1969. A keen provocateur, he did not shy away from insulting and defaming opponents and causing a stir. Repeatedly sued for libel, once by Bernard Tapie. His death remains the subject of suspicion and conspiracy theories.

received by President Banzer in Bolivia, he'd visited Chile under Pinochet, and his international celebrity now rivalled or even overshadowed that of Sartre. He brought back from his trip the material for a book, *Le premier qui s'endort réveille l'autre*, which was to include certain picturesque confidences from Molinier. To escape such invasive (and compromising) company, I was forced to feign a deep sleep.

I learned later that this giant-killer had made off along the way with certain solidarity funds designed for the Chilean resistance. To think that the microcosm of French high society had bestowed a literary reputation on this pitiful impostor! Hallier never paid the photographer Élie Kagan for his pictures published in *L'Idiot International*. A red-bearded giant, and a brawler who escaped from concentration camp, Élie had also taken valuable photographs of the massacre of Algerians in October 1961, and shot scenes of the barricades in the Latin Quarter. Fending off Kagan's pressing demands, Hallier had aggravated his case by foolishly uttering anti-Semitic insults from the toilet in his apartment (rue de Birague), where he had holed up. Élie then swore not to miss an opportunity to slap him in public. One day, at a meeting at the Mutualité, he waited for him at the foot of the platform, his camera hidden, to administer a resounding blow. From this time on, whenever he spied Kagan's red beard from a distance, Hallier rushed off like a frightened rabbit. Thank you, Élie, for this essential act of popular justice.

My initiatory visit to Argentina inoculated me against an abstract and mythical view of armed struggle. I saw that weapons did not draw an unbridgeable border between reform and revolution, and that there could be an armed reformism: the long history of Latin American populism offers several examples. Under the impact of the Cuban revolution, it was possible for armed struggle to appear as a watershed. Yet it could never define a strategy. Protracted people's war, armed insurrection, armed propaganda: a number of different projects and practices could hide under the same words.

Weapons have their own logic. For the PRT-ERP, activists were first and foremost fighters in a shadow army. Soldiers of the night, they often spent the day posing as apolitical or indifferent workers, at the price of a painful schizophrenia if social conflicts erupted in their workplace. A military apparatus generates its own needs. A considerable share of the energy mobilised and the risks run by the militants of the GOR or the 'red faction' was devoted to maintaining their own (micro) apparatus. Buying, storing and looking after weapons, renting safe houses and supporting underground activists is an expensive

business and needs money. To obtain this, you have to rob banks. And to rob banks, you need weapons. In this spiral, an increasing number of militants are socially uprooted and professionalised. Instead of melting into a social milieu like fish in water, their existence depends ever more on an expanding apparatus.

At its peak, the PRT must have had a budget comparable to that of a small African state. The lives of such a group's leaders then swing between two possibilities: a dangerous existence but with material comfort, that of adventurers on the edge of social banditry, or else the moral asceticism of a monastic discipline. Santucho strove to maintain this second option, as witness the manual of conduct, *Moral y proletariización*, that he wrote for his organisation.⁸ The most wanted man in Argentina, he would walk through the streets of the capital wearing a shabby poncho that concealed his guns. But perhaps legend went beyond reality here.

Our little anecdotes all somehow fit into history in the large, even if, like Fabrice in the confusion of Waterloo, or the painter Géricault as portrayed by Aragon in the *La Semaine sainte*,⁹ we have difficulty in deciphering its contours. A political cycle was coming to an end, that initiated by the Cuban revolution, the OLAS conferences and Che's message to the Tricontinental. Régis Debray, after being freed from a Bolivian jail in 1974, summed up in *La Critique des armes* the lessons learned since the publication of *Revolution in the Revolution* eight years previously. This critical rethink echoed our own questioning. He emphasised the complexity of the countries of Latin America, which the texts of the Tricontinental had classified as colonial along with those of Africa and Asia subject to direct forms of dependency. But their sovereignty, even if in part only formal, was not without its strategic consequences. The 'revolutionary war in Latin America', wrote Debray, 'straddles two historical classicisms that fit uncomfortably together: mixing certain features of revolutionary civil war with those of a popular liberation struggle, it has to combine the short and the long term, popular insurrection in the industrial centres (revolutionary general strike) with the formation of a popular or peasant army in the countryside, work in the armed forces (as in Russia) with the construction of a new army (as in China).' An elegant way of combining these classicisms theoretically. In practice, however, the problems were much greater.

This singular situation pressed revolutionaries to telescope rhythms and develop their project by taking as starting hypothesis

what was still no more than a possible scenario. By assuming future foreign occupation as certain, Santucho thus viewed as given, at the risk of compromising immediate tasks by subordinating them to future hypothetical ones, what precisely had to be proved: the possibility of a people's war in Argentina.

Even if we had for our part always kept our distance from his theory of the foco, we could not help recognising ourselves, at least in part, in Debray's (self-)criticism of the illusions of a 'hasty Leninism'. We also had to examine our conscience. The armed struggle voted at the 9th World Congress was an ill-timed generalisation, and the tragedy of Popular Unity in Chile a lesson for the European left.

'Many will die, victims of their mistakes,' Che had prophesied. Many indeed had died, starting with Che himself. Many, including the Bolivian peasant Thomas Chambi, Luiz Merlino, the poet Nestor, the legendary Joe Baxter,⁹ Pedro Bonnet, Luis Pujals, Celso Castro, the black American MacLean, the Chileans Bautista van Schowen, Miguel Edgardo Enriquez, Robi Santucho and 'Sayo' Villareal, Benito Urteaga, Domingo Menna, Liliana Delfino, the comrades of the 'red faction' . . .

* Thomas Chambi, died 1971, an Aymara-indigenous peasant leader who taught himself to read in the POR (Bolivian section of the USFI). Member of its central committee. Arrested 1969, and in 1970 elected vice-president of the La Paz region peasant unions. Killed as he headed a march of armed peasants opposing Hugo Banzer's coup d'état.

Joe Baxter, 1940–73, Argentine revolutionary, evolved from left Peronism to the PRT, supported the PRT-ERP ('red faction'), died in a plane crash near Paris.

Rubén Pedro Bonnet, 1942–72, Argentine revolutionary. In 1961 joined the Trotskyist group led by Nahuel Moreno, supported the majority led by M. Santucho in the split of the PRT in 1968. In 1970 elected a member of the executive committee, participated in armed actions, captured in 1971, killed during the 'Trelew massacre'.

Bautista van Schowen, 1943–73, Chilean doctor. Student leader of the Movimiento Socialista Revolucionario, the entryist project in the Socialist Party. Co-founder of the Movimiento de la Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR), chief editor of its paper *El Rebelde* and member of its secretariat. A 500,000 escudo price was placed on his head, and he was handed in by a priest. Secretly killed, together with his lieutenant, at a military detention and torture centre.

Miguel Enriquez, 1944–1974, a student leader, in the Socialist Youth. In 1964 he was expelled from the Socialists, in which he was leading a secret Movimiento Socialista Revolucionario. Had been in the Vanguardia Marxista Revolucionaria, created 1960, before taking part in the 1965 foundation of the MIR together with elements from the Communists, Socialists and Fourth International. Its general secretary from 1967, he went underground in 1969. Murdered by DINA agents during the dictatorship.

Edgardo Enriquez, died 1976, older brother of Miguel. Leader of the Chilean MIR, with special responsibility for international contacts. In Argentina after the coup d'état. Took part in the creation of the Junta de Coordinación Revolucionaria, which included Bolivia's ELN, the Chilean MIR, the Argentinian PRT, Uruguay's MLN-T. Pursued by the DINA secret police, he was murdered in Buenos Aires.

So many fallen, to whom we owe a debt.

Although brief, the Argentinian episode remains the most painful in my life as a militant. It certainly helped build the superego, laying down the imperative to continue, not give up at the first hurdle or give way to the first gloomy mood. As against what some people like to claim, our struggle was not a game (neither an intellectual exercise, a dilettante curiosity, nor an initiatory detour before the inevitable return of the prodigal son to the fold). At least, not for everyone.

Benito Urteaga, born in 1946 at San Nicolás de los Arroyos in Argentina, best known as Mariano, his cadre name. In 1968 he joined the PRT, where he quickly rose to the default second-in-command position in the Robi Santucho-led Leninist Tendency. Under Santucho's orders, he led and founded the ERP in 1970 (along with Domingo Menna). He was captured in late 1970 during a failed bank robbery, but he organised an escape and got out along with seventeen other comrades in September 1971 – an escape that would model what was to become an ERP specialty, prison breakouts. From that point on, until September 1972, he would be the leader and commander of the PRT-ERP, as all other leaders were in jail at the time. Following the escape of Santucho, and his return to command, he would again return to be the second-in-command, this time much more solidly so. He would then be charged with political education, as well as writing regularly in the Party press on theory and practice, especially military affairs. Following the capture and torture/murder of one of the ERP's top commanders, 'Comandante Pedro' Juan Eliseo Ledesma, he took over a failed offensive operation on the Monte Chingolo military base on 23 December 1975, which would be the last major offensive on the part of the ERP. He died, by Santucho's side, on 19 July 1976 – on the same day other leaders and cadre of the PRT-ERP, including Domingo Menna, would either be killed or disappeared (and eventually tortured/murdered), leading to the dissolution of the PRT-ERP.

Domingo Menna, born in Italy in 1947, was a youth and student leader of the PRT. A participant in the clashes of the Cordobazo, and leader of the first militias formed by the PRT, the May 29th Commandos and the Che Guevara Commandos. He was part of the Roberto Santucho-led Leninist Tendency of the PRT. With Benito Urteaga, he was critical in the formation of the ERP in 1970. He was arrested in January of 1971, along with a number of other PRT-ERP leaders, but was instrumental in organising the spectacular escape from Rawson prison, ending up in brief exile in Cuba. He quickly returned to Argentina, returning to the leadership, first of the Anti-imperialist and Socialist Front (Frente Anti-imperialista y por el Socialismo – FAS) then as leader of the Union Front (Frente Sindical), the PRT-ERP's labor organisation, as well as being a member of the central committee and the politburo. He continued to be active in the ERP during this time, and as repression increased, he moved around to organise defensive and offensive actions, leading to his eventual capture on 19 July 1976. Menna would die a few months later as a result of the brutal torture he was subjected to at the infamous torture centre Campo de Mayo.

Liliana Delfino, Argentine psychologist and leader of the Revolutionary Workers' Party (PRT).

Restrained Violence

And so we may well call them barbarians, with respect to the rules of reasons, but not in relation to ourselves, who surpass them in every kind of barbarism.

— Montaigne

But the wilderness had found him out early, and had taken on him a terrible vengeance for the fantastic invasion. I think it had whispered to him things about himself which he did not know, things of which he had no conception till he took counsel with this great solitude — and the whisper had proved irresistibly fascinating. It echoed loudly within him because he was hollow at the core.

— Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*

Auschwitz and Hiroshima haunt the unconscious of the postwar generations. And on top of those extremes of violence, we have had the revelations, not on the existence (well known to those willing to open their eyes) but on the scale of the concentration camp phenomenon, the hecatombs of the gulag, the colonial massacres, the ‘disappearances’ of the Argentinian generals. The century of extremes came to an end with the ethnic massacres in the Balkans and Rwanda, and the return of wars of religion.

I joined the Jeunesses Communistes at the age of fifteen, under the emotional shock aroused by the discovery of violence close to home. At least the demonstrators killed at the Charonne Métro station had a name. Their funerals were followed by an immense procession. But it took a long time until the anonymous dead of 17 October 1961 found their place in the collective memory.¹

The escalation of physical and social violence seemed in the 1960s and 70s to give an unquestionable legitimacy to the armed resistance of the oppressed. The mythical resistance of Max Hölz’s militia in the

Ruhr, the International Brigades, the Affiche Rouge, the Guingouin maquis, the partisans celebrated by Charles Tillon in his memoirs. And the more recent ones of the Awras mountains in Algeria, the people's war led by Giap, the armed struggle of Che. The new revolutionary left developed a rhetoric of innocent liberatory violence.

The iconography of Che well illustrates this emblematic unhesitating violence. It symbolises in fact an ethical concern in resort to physical violence. In the 1980s, a repentant generation presented it as a morbid example of fetishised revolutionary violence. There is undoubtedly a backdrop of 'sad passions' in shouting slogans such as 'fatherland or death', 'liberation or death'. Yet these should be distinguished from the deadly nihilism of a Millán-Astray, who erected death into a supreme sacrificial virtue.² Che Guevara's tragedy is part of what he himself described as 'an illogical moment in the history of humanity', at a time when the Vietnamese liberation struggle seemed 'tragically alone', abandoned by the supposedly 'socialist camp'. His lonely death in Bolivia was the emotional reflection of that Vietnamese – or Palestinian – solitude. And his injunction to 'create two, three Vietnams' amounted to a terrible posthumous accusation against all those who 'hesitated to make Vietnam an inviolable part of socialist territory'.

The fact that Guevara personally executed an agent of the dictatorship who had infiltrated into the guerrilla army is sometimes presented as evidence of a sadistic impulse. No one knows what disturbed and troubling parts of himself the exercise of physical constraint may bring to bear, a fortiori when a question of life and death is involved. A never-ending discussion about the state of exception in case of war or civil war is possible, or about the relationship between the exception and the rule. All resistance movements have been faced with such dilemmas. Merleau-Ponty, who was not the least bit bloodthirsty, could accept the execution of members of an occupying force and their collaborators in the heat of confrontation, but he rejected capital punishment inflicted a posteriori. And Robespierre and Saint-Just, opposed to the death penalty on principle, supported regicide on the grounds that the man who saw himself as intercessor between God and men could not be part of a common citizenship.

Che executed an enemy who had come as an assassin. Instead of speculating on psychological interpretations of this action, it is better to reflect on the choice of assuming such responsibility, rather than

retreating behind an anonymous chain of command and shifting responsibility to subordinates. It is certainly hard or impossible to disentangle the political dimension of such an extreme decision from its hidden psychic aspect. But to reduce the former to the latter, the decision in a limit situation to a suicidal or self-destructive tendency, as is nowadays done with the anti-legend of Che (and as could be done equally for someone like Marcel Rayman or Colonel Fabien*), is the path of depoliticisation. This shoddy psychology is in fact what remains when politics with its highs and lows has been removed.

In the course of their trial, the assassins of the Corsican prefect Érignac put forward in their defence the fact of having targeted a symbol of the oppressive state rather than the private person.[†] The problem is that the two are indissociable. This is what has to be dealt with. To know whether the execution of an occupier or a collaborator is legitimate is a hard political decision, necessarily fragile, with the risk of error and injustice. And whatever the accused may have said, Corsica is not France under German occupation, Érignac was not an Obersturmführer, and his murderer neither Marcel Rayman nor Thomas Elek.[‡] It is a matter of political judgement that cannot be escaped.

The question is all the more important in that the justification of the new imperialist militarism in the name of 'anti-terrorist' struggle uses terrorism as an indeterminate and indefinable category. In the rhetoric of the Pentagon's fertile minds, the terrorist threat began to supplant the totalitarian danger long before 11 September 2001 – in fact in the late 1980s. The vagueness of this umbrella term has often

* Colonel Fabien (Pierre Georges), 1919–44, an engineering worker. He joined the PCF aged fourteen and then signed up for the International Brigades aged seventeen, having lied about his age. He was elected to the central committee of the Communist Youth. Military commissioner in the Organisation spéciale (which became the FTP; Francs-Tireurs et Partisans), he was one of two authors of the first terrorist attack on German troops, killing a Kriegsmarine soldier on the Paris Métro on 21 August 1941. He was arrested and tortured but then escaped prison, and in the guise of a priest organised maquis units. He participated in the Paris insurrection of 1944 then continued the struggle in de Lattre's army, but was killed in Alsace.

† Claude Érignac, 1937–98, prefect of southern Corsica from 1996. He was assassinated by the Corsican nationalist Yvan Colonna, who was sentenced to life imprisonment.

‡ Thomas Elek, 1924–44, a Hungarian émigré high-school student, he joined the underground struggle aged sixteen. A sympathiser of the Jeunesse Communiste, in 1942 he joined the FTP-MOI (the immigrant units of the FTP) and became head of a detachment dedicated to derailing trains. He carried out many attacks. Apprehended by the Brigades spéciales, he was shot together with twenty-one other members of the Manouchian group, the so-called 'Affiche Rouge' network.

been noted.³ In a long speech of 25 October 1984 (!), George Shultz, then US secretary of state, tried the risky game of definitions, tautologically characterising terrorism as 'a modern barbarism that we call terrorism', a 'form of political violence', and finally 'a threat to Western values and civilisation'. Despite the proliferation of formulas and a vagueness that was hardly artistic, Shultz peremptorily concluded: 'There is no doubt of our capacity to use force when and where needed to combat terrorism.' In 1984, indeed, just like an exercise of Orwellian Newspeak!

More subtly, US army manuals define terrorism as 'the calculated use of violence for purposes of intimidation and coercion, in order to achieve political, religious, ideological or other objectives'. 'Or other'? A definition elastic enough to apply perfectly to the colonial wars and imperial expeditions that marked the late nineteenth century and the whole of the twentieth.

If the abolition of the distinction between belligerents and civilian populations is taken as a better criterion for defining terrorism, then terrorism is characteristic of the present era as an era of global war.⁴ From national wars to the war 'without limits' preached by George Bush, by way of the 'total war' of German strategists of the interwar years, the constant extension of the domain of war (in both time and space) has increasingly included civilian populations in the strategic calculation: every civilian thus becoming an enemy, whether actual or potential.

The development of weaponry has followed the same historical tendency. Walter Benjamin was already disturbed in the 1930s by this implacable logic of weapons. He foresaw how, with gas warfare, war would no longer have the same limits: 'Since gas warfare obviously eliminates the distinction between civilian and military personnel, the most important basis of international law is removed.'⁵ Yet he could not imagine that civilian victims, who made up only 10 per cent of the victims of war at the start of the twentieth century, would be 90 per cent of the total a century later, generally classified simply as 'collateral damage'. Benjamin did have the presentiment that 'the simple bomb-dropper', alone with himself and his god in aerial solitude, would now act with the authority of his seriously sick leader, the state: 'and wherever he places his [the state's] signature, the grass will cease to grow.' The authors of the attacks against the Manhattan towers are the very replica of this bomb-dropper – likewise along with their God in the aerial solitude. For them, too, the workers in the Twin Towers were no more than faceless insects.

The terror bombings of Guernica, Dresden, and a fortiori Hiroshima, thus appear as founding acts of the great terrorism of the modern state. The handicraft terrorism of irregulars of all kind, all things considered, is the inverted reflection of this, and no less repugnant.

These tendencies show what dead ends the Manichean crusade of Good against Evil leads to. How can the 'good' terrorism of the Chechens be distinguished from the bad terrorism of Al-Qaeda? The 'good' terrorism of the Israelis from the bad terrorism of the Palestinian suicide bombers? Is not terrorism, like hell, always other people? Yesterday's terrorists, those of the Affiche Rouge, the Algerian FLN, the Irgun and British mandate, often came to be seen as resisters, liberators, heroes and martyrs. It is a matter of perspective and political opinion, which no moral formalism (what Alain Badiou calls a 'degraded theology') can decide. As Aijaz Ahmad wrote about George Bush's 'terrorism with a global reach':

The 'terrorism' that haunts the United States is that which comes about when the Communist left and anti-colonial nationalism have both been defeated while the issue of imperialism remains unresolved and more important than ever. Hatred takes the place of revolutionary ideology. Privatized and vengeful violence takes the place of revolutionary warfare and national liberation struggles. Millenarian freelance seekers of religious martyrdom replace disciplined revolutionaries. Un-reason arises when Reason is appropriated by imperialism and is eliminated in its revolutionary form.⁶

In the context of the 1960s and the national liberation struggles, May 68 displayed a remarkable mutual restraint. After an epic tale had been made out of the night of the barricades in the Latin Quarter, and a massacre of students imagined (all the supposed 'dead' eventually made themselves known), revisionist history on the contrary saw a simulacrum of social war and a kind of violence 'for a laugh', proof that nothing had happened that deserved the title of event, as if the import of an event was necessarily measured by the number of corpses. Even Valmy was no more than a modest salvo, yet it was seen as a huge psychological victory for the Revolution, by both Goethe and modern Europe. We should not forget, however, that, if the deaths in May were few in number, in relation to the scope of the social shock, they were significant none the less: not only the Maoist

lycée student Gilles Tautin, drowned at Flins, but also the workers Blanchet and Beylot killed on the precincts of the Peugeot plant at Montbéliard.

Everything happened, however, as if, on the side of the demonstrators as well as that of the police, a limit not to be crossed had been implicitly fixed. The memoirs of police prefect Grimaud illustrate this concern for an intelligent management of the crisis. Only a few months earlier, with Papon, the butcher of October 1961, still at the Préfecture, the scenario might have turned out quite differently. The demonstrators, for their part, did not go beyond the theatrical violence of the barricades and the deployment of homemade weapons, stopping short at firearms. This can be seen as the sign of a symbolic representation or parody of insurrection, a comedy of power in which one plays without really believing it. More prosaically, this equilibrium of restrained violence undoubtedly reveals the limits of an emerging but still embryonic duality of power.

Every society develops a specific culture of violence. The age of capital and colonial conquests saw what Marx and Engels perceived right away, in relation to the civil war in the United States, as an 'industry of massacre'.⁷ Prefiguring what today are called 'humanitarian catastrophes', the colonial genocides and Victorian holocaust were the shadow side of modernity.⁸

The First World War marked the crossing of a new threshold in practices of serial death. The extermination camps of the Second World War revealed an unsuspected relationship of the human race to its capacity for self-destruction. Atomic weapons then inaugurated a new age of terror, in which the boundaries between civilians and belligerents were obliterated, and the laws of war abolished, with their claim to introduce regulation into a struggle to the death conceived as a paroxysmic form of conflict. In the *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt saw 'the period of imperialism' as prefiguring the totalitarian phenomena of the twentieth century, and 'a preparatory stage for coming catastrophes'. The motor of the imperialist idea is in fact 'the politics of expansion for expansion's sake'.⁹ There is no need to pursue this expansionist logic any deeper in order to find the expanded accumulation of capital, its spatial bulimia and its desperate flight from its own contradictions, its impersonal symbolic violence.¹⁰

Paul Valéry, a lucid observer and no troublemaker, well summed up in the wake of the Great War the expansive dynamic of commercial

empires. Its motive law is that of the maximum: maximum needs, maximum work, maximum capital, maximum return, maximum ambition, maximum modification of external nature, maximum trade and exchange . . . The only thing missing from this list is maximum profit, but one could not expect the respectable Valéry to go quite so far! This series of maximums was, he said, the very image of Europe. Faced with the conquering rise of maritime globalisation and the birth of modern imperialism, Joseph Conrad already knew, twenty years before Valéry, that 'the whole of Europe had contributed to producing Kurz'. He foresaw the growing savagery of the conquerors, bewitched by their conquest, and the breaching of the limits of what he decently referred to as 'legitimate aspirations'.

Half a century later, in *The Quiet American*, Graham Greene described the French bombing of Vietnam: 'The cannon gave a single burst of tracer, and the sampan blew apart in a shower of sparks: we didn't even wait to see our victims struggling to survive, but climbed and made for home.'¹¹

This shattered sampan, those anonymous civilian deaths, which no longer count and which are no longer counted, those faceless individuals, dehumanised and miniaturised to the scale of insects, prefigure the future of asymmetrical wars, 'collateral damage', the criminalisation and bestialisation of the enemy, expelled from the human species in the name of the Good triumphing over absolute Evil.¹²

It is hardly surprising that, by a boomerang effect, this old Europe, minuscule on the map of the world, also experienced in the course of the century the 'maximum' of violence and the greatest concentration of violent deaths per square metre: two world wars, the Russian Revolution and counter-revolution, the Spanish civil war, the Balkan wars, the Greek resistance, the Judeocide . . .

Hard to do more.

There is a history and technology of violence, from the stick and the sling to weapons of mass destruction, atomic, chemical or biological, by way of the anti-riot chassepot, Haussmann's cannons, and the combat submarine. The same applies to armies, from the Roman tortoise, via Frederick II's oblique order, the Napoleonic artillery, the armoured columns of the Wehrmacht and Giulio Douhet's strategic bombing, through to today's rapid deployment forces. The history of strategic doctrines organises and combines these elements. To the extent that it necessarily tends to conceive the totality and go

beyond the compartmentalisation of knowledge, military high theory is a passionate subject.

Today we are very likely entering a new mutation of the means and modalities of extreme conflict, in a metamorphosis of the very notion of war. Made official by the United States administration in 2002, the doctrine of preventive war does away with a large part of the principles on which international law has been built up. 'Asymmetrical warfare' breaks the reciprocity of risk undergone, and de-dramatises the decision (no longer a 'declaration') to go to war on the part of the side that takes the initiative. This asymmetry is not simply one of the forces and resources committed, it lies also in the estimate of losses and costs: the victims on the side of the powerful are counted in single figures, but by tens and hundreds of thousands on the side of the dominated (when anyone still bothers to count them). The new global or imperial warfare is thus happily freed from the constraints of existing international law, without any new code of the uses of violence having been defined. This is why it seeks its justifications in a higher order of values. Proclaimed to be 'ethical' or 'humanitarian', it makes the exorbitant claim to draw a new divide between the human and the non-human; hence the fall back into a new form of holy war and race war, and the demonisation of the enemy.

The generalised privatisation of the world cannot be limited to commodities, goods and services. It inexorably extends to the privatisation of violence, the abolition of the state monopoly on its legitimate exercise, the dissemination of its means and the proliferation of 'irregular' actors (militias, armed bands, mafias). The deliberately confused presentation in imperial rhetoric of an obscure and ungraspable terrorism bases itself on these very real tendencies in order to build, on fear and anxiety, the vision of a world under assault from barbarians.¹³ It masks the fact that this barbarism is in no way foreign to civilisation, being rather its reverse and inverse side. It is *its* barbarism.

In our Latin American evenings, a comical West Indian from the Dominican Republic won great success by recounting in a strong Caribbean accent the fable of the lion and the runaway slave. As a punishment, the black man was condemned to confront the lion in the arena. The lion chased him and tore his back with its claw. But the black man shook the lion off and managed to escape. The lion caught him again, broke his jaw and tore the poor man's flesh to shreds, but

he managed again to escape. Octavio had the art of spinning out the story and keeping his audience on the edge of their seats. In a desperate leap, the man managed to get behind the lion, seize its tail, and bite it until the blood flowed. The lion twisted in pain. But the indignant crowd stood up and shouted on the stands: '*Pelea sucia, negro!*' Not a fair fight! Between oppressors and oppressed, the struggle is always asymmetrical.

The recent development of technologies and strategies, however, invites us to investigate the anthropology of violence – a question absent from the debates of the 1960s and 70s. The revolutionary tradition, in fact, was accustomed to a certain insouciance, opposing the violence of the oppressed to the violence of the oppressors as if there was no common ground at all between them. The cruel reprisals of the oppressed, attested to in many circumstances, were in most cases viewed as the product of a temporary contamination by the brutality of those above. 'They have made barbarians of us,' Babeuf bitterly exclaimed, in the face of what he characterised as the 'populicide' in the Vendée. More generally, the revolutionary left has held to the classic metaphors of violence as the 'midwife' or 'locomotive' of history, and not sought to go beyond these. Such justified violence was deemed to be exercised necessarily in the direction of progress. The reflections of George Sorel or Walter Benjamin on the dialectic of right and force did not find the continuations and deepenings that they demanded.

In his articles on Tolstoy, written between 1911 and 1938, André Suarès kept to a strict interpretation of the social roots of violence: 'Violence is necessarily the only relationship between two enemy classes.' It then appeared both legitimate and 'positive': 'It will take every form, from the union of workers against their bosses, through to civil war.' And yet Suarès put forward a hypothesis that expanded this thesis: 'Wealth is the sign of violence, at every level.' The same violence at work in war exists also between the sexes, 'by will and desire', as it exists among men 'by the fact of fortune': 'The possessor, whether he intends to or not, demeans the object of his possession, ruins it or kills it. Property is violence.'¹⁴

Whilst this violence has undergone changes and transformations in the course of the twentieth century, both quantitative and qualitative, its perception by the radical left did not develop in parallel in the 1960s, despite the great protests against nuclear weapons. All the more so, as the legitimate defence of the colonised, celebrated in the

texts of Fanon and Sartre's preface to these, reinforced the image of a legitimate liberatory violence on the part of the oppressed. This justification sometimes drifted, particularly in certain Maoist milieus, towards a disturbing fetishism of violence.

And yet we did not see in France any explicit theorisations of violence as necessary catalyst of revolutionary subjectivity, at least nothing comparable to the writings of the Baader-Meinhof group in Germany, or certain trends within Italian *operaismo*.¹⁵ Very happily, the indescribable *Vers la guerre civile*, authored by Alain Geismar and Serge July in the aftermath of 1968, did not mark the era and had only little influence. The Nouvelle Résistance Populaire* verified beyond expectations that when history staggers, it is repeated as a farce: Olivier Rolin's novel *Tigre en papier* is pathetic evidence of this. Finally, if there has been a contribution to reflection on violence, this should rather be sought, over the years, in the catalogue of Éditions Champ Libre, which published, under the impulse of Gérard Guégan, a number of classics and documents on military strategy and art.

The practice of physical violence in the 1970s is today the object of a double representation. For certain people involved at that time, who have made their return to regular life, it crystallises, for want of the wars and revolutions that they did not experience, the fantastic moment of great frisson. It is then the object of poetic exaggeration and rhapsody, inversely proportionate to the prosaic resignation that is triumphant today. For others, who have openly or obliquely repented, the deliberate taste for violence draws the only real dividing line between a temperate left reformism and the mythic pursuit of an improbable apocalypse. Violence with a capital 'V' then appears as the original matrix of bloody terrorist temptations. This (bad) trip has become the polemical theme of Socialist Party leaders who lack any project in the face of the revolutionary left. In the past century's theatre of cruelty, however, revolutionaries have been victims more often than executioners, and often doubly victim – persecuted both by military and fascist dictatorships and by Stalinist bureaucrats or agents of the Gestapo. The social democrats, on the other hand, have been party to all colonial wars that should not have been waged, and absent from those wars that should have been waged, in defence of the Spanish republic or Algerian independence. Not forgetting their share of responsibility in the murder of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa

* The armed wing of the Gauche Prolétarienne.

Luxemburg, which marked the beginning of criminal practice within the workers' movement.

In retrospect, the parody aspect of the violence deployed by an organisation like the Ligue Communiste in the 1970s is striking. Part of Europe was still living under the jackboot of dictatorship. Many countries brought in exceptional legislation and police services.¹⁶ In Italy, the far right's strategy of tension sowed confusion in a social mêlée, and fuelled a perverse game of manipulation that was propitious to the reign of mutual suspicion.¹⁷ In France, the minister of the interior, Marcellin, was a dangerous maniac for order. Chile, in other words, was close.

In this context, our concern to 'act as if', to show what we could do if we did not ourselves set limits not to be crossed, for both moral and political reasons, is self-evident. Thus we were attentive to the conjuncture, to the balance of forces, and to our actions being justifiable and understandable to working people.

The visit to Paris of General Ky, the South Vietnamese dictator and puppet of the United States, was a good example of this. His official itinerary was over-protected, not only by the French services but by the presence of his own praetorian guard. We wanted to prove that, despite this surfeit of precautions, we would have been capable of killing him. A group of our stewards, on the roof of the École Polytechnique, succeeded in launching a paint bomb precisely at his official car. Successful demonstration: this could have been a grenade or a gunshot, rather than just cocking a snook. To succeed in what seemed like a simple prank, however, the risks taken were real (and perhaps out of proportion): the general's bodyguards were not equipped with water pistols. They pulled out their guns immediately after the projectile landed, and would certainly have been able to fire, if our artillery had not promptly disappeared over the rooftops.

The action against the Bank of Spain, on Christmas Eve 1970, was another example. The death penalty pronounced by the Burgos tribunal against Izko and half a dozen militant Basque nationalists were immediately carried out. Our bank raid was unlike anything seen in the Westerns, not even the burlesque passages of *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. Paris was covered with snow. We had assembled some forty masked bandits in the vicinity of Les Halles. Our mass eruption into the bank was so unexpected, and so unlike anything seen in films, that the cashiers, believing this was a farce, began to burst out laughing. Those in charge of the operation briefly explained

to them that this was a political action, that we had nothing against them as individuals, were not even after the cash, but that we were going to sack the premises in protest against Francoist iniquity. As they continued to smile without seeming to understand, a smashed light bulb on the counter gave the signal for devastation. This was done in such a disordered fury that we ended up triggering the alarm signal and shattering the reinforced window from the inside. A magnificent frenzy followed. The cashiers were no longer laughing. They screamed in the midst of the fracas of iron bars, emptied drawers, scattered files. Not a single person was arrested. But, once again, a panic gesture on the part of an armed guard could have set off a troublesome mishap. On exiting from the bank, when the assailants took off their scarfs and made their way through the crowd, we noticed a Scandinavian tourist who was filming the scene – a nice rogue's gallery for the police. We confiscated the film, and he was unable to take back with him this valuable souvenir of his stay in Paris.

We had an undeniable sense of spectacle. The same day as the attack on the bank, we had planned to occupy the Sacré-Coeur in the evening and barricade ourselves in there for the Christmas night. We had brought up a van with enough food supplies to sustain a siege of several days. The police would thus have the choice between tolerating this focus of combat or dislodging the occupants at the risk of skirmishes that were scarcely compatible with the good news of the Nativity. At half past seven, several hundred militants arriving from different points climbed the Montmartre hill in a crocodile, like ants in the snow. At the moment when we gathered on the steps of the basilica, built 'to expiate the crimes of the Commune', the transistors announced that the Basque condemnees were to be reprieved. We were relieved, but, let's admit it, a little disappointed at not having been able to sound the bell of Sacré-Coeur on Christmas night.

A few years later, we organised a new action against the death penalty, following the condemnation of two further Basque militants, Garmendia and Otaegui, who were indeed executed. Disguised as tourists, with cameras round their necks, a hundred of our militants occupied the towers of Notre-Dame. On a preliminary reconnoitre, a guide had explained to us, not without pride, that in case of a power failure the bells could be rung by rope, as at the time of Quasimodo. We listened attentively. In the morning, we toured the drugstores for earplugs, to protect the eardrums of our intended bell-ringers. The

pharmacists found this sudden over-consumption rather odd. We also visited an abattoir to fill a respectable number of large cans with cow's blood. The seller was surprised by this unaccustomed order, but imagined it was a student rag.

By the end of the morning we had occupied the platform between the two towers, blocked the spiral stairways with barbed wire, poured blood into the gargoyles and set off the great bell to sound the tocsin. Several ringers together, wearing hoods and earplugs, were needed to move the enormous bell, which the guide had boasted could be heard for ten kilometres around. When the police arrived to dislodge us, they had to negotiate a withdrawal in good order, without arrests. Neither they nor ourselves had looked forward to a pitched battle between the towers, a hundred metres above ground level, before the astonished eyes of tourists, reduced to the scale of insignificant insects, at what they no doubt believed was a dramatic spectacle. The balance of terror did its work. We won the day. We were able to descend through one tower while the police climbed up the other, dismantling the barbed wire. But the affair could well have got out of hand.

The Hollywood-style imagination of the leaders of our *service d'ordre* was never short on ideas. For the visit of a US head of state (Nixon, no doubt), we had wanted to organise a spectacular symbolic action of solidarity with Vietnam. We imagined wrapping the Statue of Liberty (the 11-metre replica on the Île aux Cygnes) with sheets drenched in petrol, and making this into a torch lighting up the night. It proved rather complicated to climb the statue so as to place a cord over its shoulder by which the sheet could be hoisted. The solution was to tie the cord to an arrow shot from the base of the statue. Our archers trained conscientiously in the Bois de Vincennes. The second arrow hit its target. Unfortunately, however, the cord soon gave way under the weight of the soaked sheet. The only solution was a pile of tires at the foot of the statue, whose flames gave off a thick black smoke as the tourist boats passed by.

A number of similar anecdotes would confirm this ironic diverting of a symbolic form of violence.¹⁸ The Maoists practised a similar restraint and self-irony. But Geismar, Glucksmann, Benny Lévy and Serge July were never great humourists. Faced with the crucial test of a risky action (the possible execution of the Renault executive, Nogrette, kidnapped by way of reprisal after the murder of Pierre Overney), they wisely beat the retreat. The actual executions of

Tramoni (the guard who murdered Overney), of the American agent Ray, of the Mossad agent Barimontov, and of the Renault managing director Georges Besse by Action Directe, were much later.* Their context was already one of reflux, and two of them were linked with international conflicts.

Observers have puzzled over the difference between the comparative dynamic of the violence of the 1970s in Italy, Germany and France – Spain being a distinct case on account of the Francoist repression. Some believe that the spiral of escalation was broken in France thanks to the influence on the microcosm of the new Maoist resistance by humanist intellectuals such as Sartre. But there are several other reasons, social and cultural.

In Germany, armed violence was the act of a small minority, and practically came to an end with the Stammheim tragedy. The writings of Andreas Baader and Ulrike Meinhof clearly indicate its link with the traumatic legacy and ‘guilt’ of the German past. The country that experienced ‘the largest insurgent youth’ in modern Europe, and the most intense violent demonstrations, was uncontestedly Italy: ‘a long season of political and social subversion’ from 1969 to 1980.¹⁹ Violence there took the proportions of a large-scale social phenomenon, as attested by the 24,000 trials and 5,000 condemnations in these ‘years of lead’. Between 1969 and 1980, out of 12,690 violent actions recorded (a far from negligible share of these being attributable to the far right), more than 40 per cent targeted businesses and their executives, and 30 per cent state apparatuses. And among those charged in northern Italy with ‘attempting to subvert the constitutional order’, militants originating from the south were over-represented.

The specificities of the Italian situation are perhaps due to the late construction of a nation-state, imposed on society from above, to the trauma of fascism, to the importance of anti-fascism in the radical left, to the intrigues of a mafia-ridden state apparatus (largely confirmed since, by the revelations about the Gladio network and by the ‘clean hands’ operation), to the limited sovereignty imposed by NATO, to the weight of an industrial proletariat that was relatively recent and hailed largely from the rural regions of the Mezzogiorno (workers who were referred to as *terroni*, or ‘bumpkins’), to the effects

* Georges Besse, 1927–86, French businessman. Led several large state-controlled companies, from 1985 CEO of Renault, probably killed by the armed group Action Directe.

of a brutal urbanisation, and to a fervent Catholic tradition re-invested in a radical left bent on justice.

In January 1976, I attended the founding congress of Lotta Continua. This was at the time the largest organisation of the extra-parliamentary left. The theses presented in the name of the leadership by Adriano Sofri timidly expressed the intention of breaking with certain leftist naïveties: 'The history of these last ten years has shown how claiming the right to revolutionary violence, which has always had a subjective value, cannot be taken as a strategic criterion, and proves unable to serve as the basis of a genuinely autonomous political line.' The fetishism of forms of struggle, and violence in particular, began to be perceived as the expression of a juvenile impatience: 'The theory of the exemplary character of armed struggle, the theory of the party as detonator, the cult of the rifle, are aspects taken by the militarist deviation on the margins of the movement.'

Yet the machinery was in motion. While the congress of January 1976 marked the high point of Lotta Continua, and its charismatic leader enjoyed unchallenged authority (going as far as expressions of a personality cult that were shocking to our eyes), in the following autumn the organisation would dissolve itself, after a second apocalyptic congress. Sofri described himself at that time as a bar pianist, trying to play as if nothing was wrong while chairs flew, shots were fired, and the scenery collapsed around him. Lotta Continua did not succeed in making the turn it envisaged. It had even lost political control of its security service, many of whose militants would swell the ranks of the armed groups from 1977 on.

The appearance of these groups and their rise in power, from 1977 to 1980, came just after the Italian Communist Party had reached its electoral apogee in 1976, with 35 per cent of the vote, practically on a par with the Christian Democrats. But its line of 'historic compromise' quickly proved to be a blind alley. The social compromise (known as the EUR compromise, after the name of the building in which the negotiations took place) agreed by the trade unions was marked by frustration, division, and a decline of the movement that had begun with the 'hot autumn' of 1969. Paradoxically, the perspective of insurrection, which for Lotta Continua held the place of a strategic project, maintained in practice a subaltern relationship with the 'historic compromise', despite being supposed to prepare for something well beyond it. In 1977, the two orientations, competing and complementary at the same time, entered into a parallel crisis.

While the number of 'attacks and acts of violence' was estimated at an annual average of 600 between 1969 and 1976, they suddenly rose to an average of more than 2,000 in the years 1977 to 1979. Deadly attacks 'attributed' to the left rose from three or four per year, in the first half of the 1970s, to an average of twenty-five between 1979 and 1981. There then came the time of retrospection, disassociation and repentance, and the time of state vengeance against an inadmissible and defeated enemy. A quarter of a century later, 'this country preserves that time with intact rancour in an icon of hatred', as Erri de Luca bitterly notes.²⁰

In France, the riots in Le Mans, Caen and Redon on the eve of 1968, the struggles at Le Joint Français in 1971 and Lip in 1973, illustrated for us the tendency of a young proletariat of rural origin to break with the legalism of the big trade-union organisations. Violent mass actions, however, often remained the work of rural movements such as the winegrowers' action committees.²¹ Following the dissolution of the Gauche Prolétarienne, and the rout of the 'new partisans', the Ligue Communiste was certainly the organisation best placed to give itself a military project and embark on a path comparable to that of the Italian far left. The effectiveness of its parody-style actions attests to a promising discipline and meticulousness. Its political culture and its choices certainly played a role of fireguard in the developing landscape of the radical left in France.

This culture was characterised above all by a non-militaristic conception of self-defence. This came in part from the fact that some of its cadres (including Henri Weber) had been influenced by the left Zionist organisation Hashomer Hatsaïr. Recruited on political grounds, rather than physical or technical, our *service d'ordre* was conceived right from the start as one militant task among others, rather than a specialised permanent commando of supermen and superwomen. Its members were chosen every year by the rank-and-file cells. From 1971, far from the stereotype of a group of heavily muscled troopers, it was mixed, right up to its leadership team. This was unusual among left organisations of the time, and was not without consequence for a certain de-sacralisation of physical violence. Finally, the stewarding service always remained under the direct charge of the political leadership, two or three members of which were personally responsible for it. This close link effectively contributed to stemming any Italian-style drift, with the tendency of the 'military' to become autonomous. In the case of Lotta Continua, this

autonomisation, accelerated by the organisational crisis, played a large part in the tendency to militarisation and forward flight.²²

The Ligue also profited from its participation in international experiences that were fruitful in practical lessons. The role of certain militants in the Argentinian affair, the involvement in the anti-Franco struggle in Spain and in Euzkadi, participation in the Portuguese experience between April 1974 and November 1975, provided valuable material for reflection on the logic of violence and on political errors to be avoided. In the late 1970s, comparative study of the Chilean and Portuguese processes held a key place in our training schools and courses.²³

Finally, our effort at implanting ourselves in the factories, and the good sense of our veteran workers, provided a reality principle that fortunately counterbalanced leftist temptations. As distinct from those organisations that came out of May 68 without an organisational tradition or a strategic memory, the Ligue had its roots in the history of the workers' movement. It was nourished on the debates of the 1930s, the legacy of which it was keen on appropriating, not only in connection with revolutionary anti-militarism, but also by assimilating the great controversies over the 'lessons of October', the March action of 1921 in Germany, the Hamburg insurrection of 1923, the failure of resistance to Mussolini's march on Rome, the resistible rise of Nazism in Germany, the insurrection in the Asturias in 1934, and May 1937 in Barcelona. These historic references furnished, if not models, at least valuable strategic reference points.²⁴

Yet all these fireguards would not have been enough to prevent a loss of control after 21 June 1973. The dissolution of the Ligue marked in fact the limits of forms of legal violence. The dynamic of confrontations with the far right that we had become involved in risked turning into a kind of little private war. The Chilean coup d'état spurred us to reflect on possible scenarios in case of electoral victories for the left in France or Italy, a fortiori in the plausible hypothesis (after the great movement against the Burgos trial and the general strike in Pamplona) of a sudden overthrow of the Franco dictatorship. We therefore envisaged crossing a new boundary, by differentiating between the public legal structure of our stewards' service and a conspiratorial apparatus charged with preparing for a possible sharpening of the situation. An apparatus of this kind, however, cannot remain indefinitely waiting, and content itself with empty exercises. It inevitably tends to develop its own logic and to exercise a pressure

to move to real action. In 1973, the still remote perspective of an electoral victory of the left in 1978 gave us time to look ahead.

The priority tasks for the new structure were to organise work in the army, and to establish a range of technical services. On the basis of democratic demands of a trade-union nature (such as free transport for conscripts, posting close to home and increase in pay), we launched a public appeal signed by a hundred soldiers in all arms of the service, known as the 'appeal of the hundred'. These hundred rapidly grew into several thousand. Soldiers' committees sprung up like mushrooms. We then set up a logistics network of civilian correspondents in charge of mail, printing barracks newssheets, transporting material and legal support. This movement reached its climax in autumn 1974, when soldiers from the local garrison came out in uniform to demonstrate en masse in the streets of Draguignan and Karlsruhe. Nothing like this had ever been seen. These two demonstrations were both inspired by militants of the Ligue, Robert Pelletier in Draguignan and Luc Bénétières in Karlsruhe.* We feared heavy penalties, but the trial of the Draguignan squaddies turned into a triumph. Robert Pelletier delivered an exemplary political defence, receiving support, at least in terms of attesting to his morality, from David Rousset and two future armed forces ministers, Charles Hernu and Jean-Pierre Chevènement.²⁵

The late 1970s clearly marked both a political and a cultural turn. A series of events contributed to the realisation that physical violence, and a fortiori armed violence, is not simply the continuation of politics by other means, no matter how well intentioned. It starts something obscure that no one can ever be sure of controlling, and whose beginnings are perceptible in little everyday things. For example, we had formed the habit of organising a 'special police evening' at training schools. This was a kind of role play. Militants arrested in a delicate situation were subjected to an interrogation in the course of which they were supposed to put into practice the teaching contained in a highly didactic pamphlet on 'what every revolutionary must know about repression'. Certain leading figures played the interrogators. These sessions were highly successful, but they invariably

* Robert Pelletier, born 1948, member of the LC, LCR, and NPA. Organiser of the soldiers' demonstration at Draguignan (1974). CGT official. Rejoined LCR in 2006 and participated in founding of the NPA.

Luc Bénétières, LCR member. Organiser of the soldiers' demonstration at Karlsruhe (January 1975)

showed two things. On the one hand, the ease with which an individual, even if alerted, can get confused in his lies and reveal intimate failings. On the other, the latent sadism of certain 'policemen', who played their evening role so zealously that one had the frightful sense of arousing the latent 'Chekist' that sometimes lies unknown and dormant at the bottom of our unconscious.

Who knows what mixture of disgust and disturbing enjoyment certain people might have felt in kneecapping class enemies in Italy, with either bullets or an iron bar? In Mexico in the 1980s, Mario Payaras, one of the founders of the Guatemalan guerrilla,²⁶ told us how, with the growth of the guerrilla movement and the recruitment of fighters who were still adolescents, the armed force began to break free from its political goals. And how a Manichean depiction of social struggle, with weapons at its disposal, could collapse into the horrors of which Cambodia under Pol Pot had no monopoly. He drew the conclusion of a necessary return to more classical forms of organisation and the primacy of politics over military action, without which the logic of violence gets carried away and risks becoming uncontrollable.

Having read Victor Serge, Ante Ciliga, Trotsky and David Rousset, we were aware of the gulag before reading Solzhenitsyn. During the 1980s, reading Shalamov's *Kolyma Tales*, Zazoubrine's *Le Tchékiste* and the diaries of Isaac Babel had a greater impact on us than did *Gulag Archipelago*.²⁷ Undoubtedly because these authors (like Boris Pilnyak) had been actors in the revolution, engaged on the side of the Reds in the civil war against the Whites. Their accounts were of the period before the Soviet Thermidor. They attest to police and bureaucratic tendencies at work already in this era of civil war, in the practices of the apparatus and the Cheka. They show that the despotic logic of power is irreducible to its deformations and abuses. Yet this does not justify establishing a simple continuity between the political prison of the Solovki islands, opened in the early 1920s, and the great deportations of the following decade. The change of scale, both quantitative and qualitative, that both Trotsky and Hannah Arendt emphasised, confirmed today by the evidence of archives and the work of historians such as Moshe Lewin and Eric Hobsbawm, genuinely amounted to a counter-revolutionary break.²⁸

The unleashing of conflicts between China, Vietnam and Cambodia, after the liberation of Indochina in the late 1970s, dealt a terrible blow to the myth of solidarity among peoples. The first

revelations on the Cambodian charnel house raised crucial questions about the possible drift of violence (that of the 'board of nails' opposite the computer dear to Armand Gatti), whose liberating virtues we had contributed to celebrating. Ever more copious and detailed information also began to confirm our suspicions as to the hidden face of the Chinese Cultural Revolution and its immense cost in human lives.²⁹

Some people then put Third Worldism in the dock, others went into a more discreet mourning. The victims only deserved compassion on condition that they remained in this role. If they took it in their minds to win, they would soon don the garb of the executioner. In parallel with the counter-reform launched by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, Pascal Bruckner's *The Tears of the White Man* would soon crown this verdict of innocence on the white man, obliterating colonial bad conscience and rehabilitating Western values.³⁰ While aware of the 'rift' that had been made in the great narrative of emancipation, we still preferred the sober response of the American journalist portrayed in Joffé's *The Killing Fields*.³¹ When questioned about his blindness in the face of the cruelty of which the Khmer Rouge 'liberators' had shown themselves capable, he replied that he had above all underestimated the effects of a barbarism inflicted on peoples dominated by years of war, defoliants, napalm and everyday humiliation, on top of all the other accumulated images of a century of savage hyper-violence. This division of responsibilities does not discharge the oppressed from their own share. It cannot justify the unjustifiable. But it has the merit of reminding us that the dialectic of violence involves (at least) two parties, and that the relationship is as asymmetrical as that kind of warfare.

In the early 1970s, the brandishing of weapons and the lighting of flames still seemed charged with hope. By the turn of the 1980s, the horizon had markedly darkened. Certain liberators had become criminals. The impetus of new rights had lost its innocence. Violence and progress no longer marched together, at the same pace, in the supposed direction of history. Reflection on totalitarianism forced a reconsideration of the meaning of wholesale massacre and genocide,

* Reference to Armand Gatti's play *V comme Vietnam* (1967). (See his *Oeuvres théâtrales*, (Lagrasse: Éditions Verdier, 1991), pp. 1261–1360). The play represents the imperialist offensive of the US assisted by a computer which is the 'superbank of the world's memory' against the Vietnamese people armed only with a board of nails but which nonetheless ineluctably triumphs.

not just as accidental aberrations, but as revelatory of the 'banality of evil' of which the human species was capable. The Iranian revolution would put the very idea of revolution in question.

In 1975, Norbert Elias's book on *The Civilizing Process* appeared in French translation. This historic fresco culminates in a state monopoly of military and police, guaranteeing the appearance of spaces in which 'the individual is largely protected from sudden attack, the irruption of physical violence into his or her life'.³² In exchange, people are constrained to curb their own passions and aggressive impulses. This utopia of security where risk is minimised still shared the illusion of progress. A quarter of a century later, the tendency to a privatisation and dissemination of violence is accelerating. Ethnic cleansing and religious massacres are proliferating. The world is collapsing into the hyper-violence of armed globalisation. The perspective of a decent and pacific society is increasingly remote. A 'risk society' is making its return.

This gloomy development raises afresh, and forcefully, the question of the dialectic of ends and means, and of the ethical regulation of violence. Against the majority of hasty readers who take Trotsky's pamphlet *Their Morals and Ours* as a handbook of political cynicism, this text, written in 1938 in response to the Moscow trials and the questions of John Dewey, is a plea against bureaucratic common sense and its maxim that 'you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs'. Trotsky maintains on the contrary that 'the end that justifies the means immediately raises the question of knowing what justifies the end', since the end in its turn needs to be justified. The 'great revolutionary end' thus necessarily spurns 'those base means and ways which set one part of the working class against other parts, or attempt to make the masses happy without their participation; or lower the faith of the masses in themselves and their organization, replacing it by worship for the "leaders"'.

These constraining criteria imply in particular a categorical rejection of weapons of mass destruction that no longer make a distinction between civilians and combatants. They oppose wars of race or religion on principle. They condemn without appeal, for reasons that are both political and moral, attacks such as those of 11 September. Of course, no rule can respond to all concrete situations. But at least it makes it possible to designate and circumscribe the exception, instead of banalising it.³³

The ever more crying disproportion of technical and logistic means of armed violence, the growing asymmetry of weapons

deployed, the 'gaping discrepancy' that Walter Benjamin revealed in 1933 'between the gigantic power of technology and the minuscule moral illumination it affords', impel us to conceive forms of struggle that are themselves asymmetrical.³⁴ Étienne Balibar thus envisages combining Lenin and Gandhi with a view to overcoming the 'impotence' of the deadly quest for power at any price.

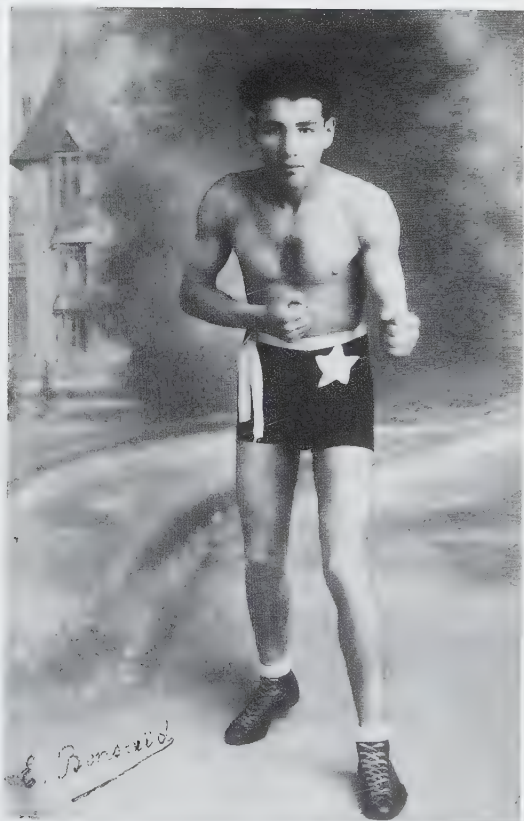
The extinction of social and physical violence in human society is unfortunately not something we shall see tomorrow. As long as social relations remain relations of force, the oppressed will not be able to exercise the force of their right. The hypothesis of a dialectical turn, by way of which gentleness would 'enter the heart of the most violent by their seeing the vanity of everything',³⁵ sadly remains, as far ahead as we can see, too hazardous to form the basis of politics. It is also why one can be resolutely peaceful without falling into the illusion of an angelic pacifism.

Being unable to eradicate violence in a foreseeable future, we must at least work to discipline and restrain it, which presupposes the development of a new legal culture, and a culture of violence itself. One learns to appreciate wine without becoming alcoholic, and to drive without becoming reckless. Why should it be impossible to develop a culture of dominated violence? Certain military codes, and certain martial arts, have sketched a few pointers in this direction. Under threat of collective self-destruction, our era has a responsibility to invent in its turn new regulations and new customs.



Two-year-old Daniel, 1948

Haïm Bensäid, Daniel's father





'My parents' bistro'



Annual school photo, 1955

Daniel aged 14



Palais des Sport, 23 May 1974



Martine

UNION NATIONALE DES ETUDIANTS DE FRANCE

ASSOCIATION GENERALE
DES ETUDIANTS DE TOULOUSE

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Le Président de l'Association J. Lairal

Le Titulaire



UNEF membership card



With Alain Krivine and Henri Weber, 1969



Daniel leading the Ligue's 'service d'ordre' (stewards) on a demonstration, 1973

With Henri Weber



Sophie

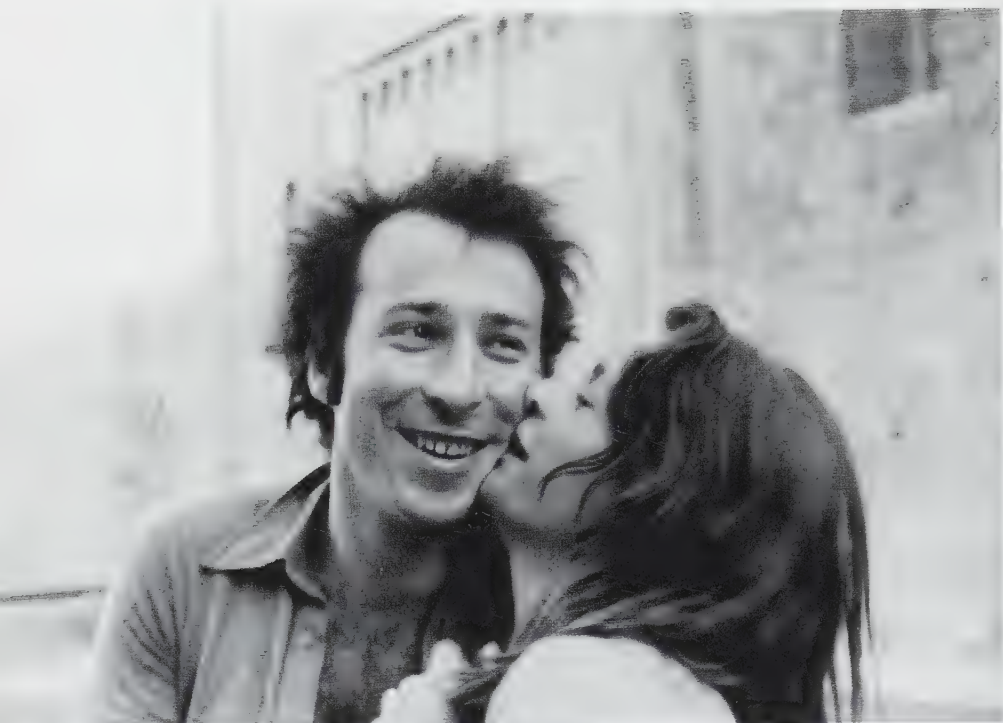




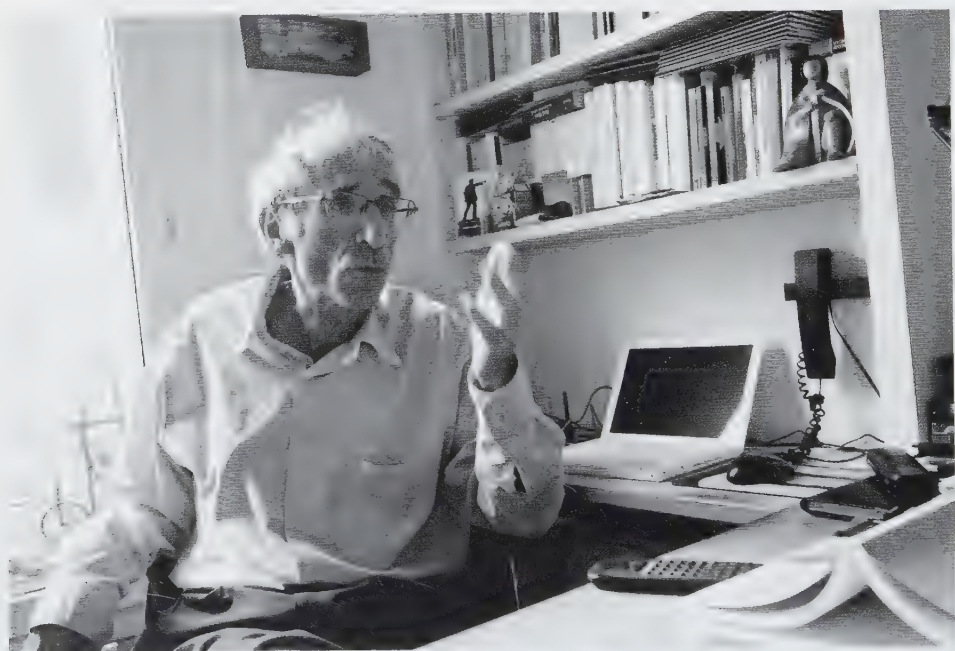
Funeral of Pierre Overney, a Maoist militant killed by a Renault security guard, 4 March 1972



Portugal, 1975



With Sophie, c. 1972



Daniel, c. 2008

Colour Rouge

The colour that was within, and emerges.

– Paul Claudel, *Conversations dans le Loir-et-Cher*

In the unceasing rush of the 1970s, we remained torn between a bohemian impatience for combat and the patient burrowing of the mole. Fed on the classics of the workers' movement, we were not so naïve as to believe that the student movement could substitute for the strategic force of the working class. As early as autumn 1968, correcting the sociological disequilibrium (one could use a stronger word) of our base appeared a question of political survival. We felt the volatility of youth radicalisation, and feared being carried away with it if we did not succeed in striking root in the everyday life of social relations.

The first 'mole groups' were formed. In the rough drawings of Pierre Wiaz and Piotr Barsony, the mole soon became our joking fetish, pot-bellied and facetious. There were mole postmen (belt and satchel), mole engineers (in dungarees), mole railwaymen (perched on traditional smoking locomotives), mole nurses (syringe at the ready). Their muzzles, refractory and wild, illustrated our 'workplace newssheets', to the great displeasure of Stalinist bureaucrats who dreamed of breaking the neck of this furry little animal that so riled them.¹

I take the opportunity here to greet with affection the handful of working-class militants who, in the aftermath of 1968, were prepared to cope with the exasperating throes of an organisation with a large student majority, its interminable meetings, lazy discussions, and theatrical debate that was often unprofitable. Whether old hands (like André Fichaut, Jack Houdet, Roland Vacher),² early recruits from the new generation (such as the railwayman-poet Patrick Seignon, 'inventor' of the mole groups, Isidore Garcia or Jo Malet in Toulouse

and Jean Laferrière in Montrouge), or new arrivals, they all needed, in order to resist such a regime, an admirable endurance, a robust conviction and an insatiable curiosity. I pay my respects here to the patience of these stubborn moles.³

After the page of student militancy was turned, and attention paid to the various workplace cells, I was fortunate to undertake alongside these a second apprenticeship that was particularly educational. When André Breton joined the Communist Party, he was sent to work with the gas and electricity workers. In my case, it was the Compagnie des Compteurs in Montrouge, the cell at the Gare de Lyon (distributing the 'mole' in the cloakrooms along with Rico Lajous⁴ was not risk-free), and our cell at the Saint-Antoine hospital. After the dissolution of 1973, the 'turn to the workers' that the Ligue negotiated found expression in a wage of occupational training, industrial employment and geographical moves. This was followed by a monthly publication, *Les Cahiers de la Taupe*, which was edited first by Suzette Triton and then by Sophie.⁵ We spent many a studious weekend tête-à-tête, refuting articles about wage increases in the official union press, analysing experiences of workers' control, commenting on the latest occupational statistics, unpicking the successive calculations of the *Programme commun*, breaking lances over nationalisation and studying legislation on works committees and Social Security. It was a good school, as the run of *Cahiers* can still attest to.

Pompidou died in spring 1974. We had to launch into another hunt for mayoral signatures in support of Alain Krivine. The improvised campaign of 1969 had been buoyed up by the spirit of May. That of 1974 was against the current and uncertain. Our television spots spelled out the future red army in full detail: soldiers' committees to subvert the regular army, workers' councils to put an end to bosses' despotism, and, in culmination, armed insurrection to crush the armed gangs of capital! These fiery speeches, making hearths tremble, interrupted peaceful households at supper-time, between pears and cheese. We naturally viewed Arlette's first campaign condescendingly, as she seemed to reduce her profile by demagogically flattering small business.

The punishment was harsh: Krivine 0.36 per cent. But we would not be discouraged by the vagaries of the 'electoral farce'. Wiaz drew

* Arlette Laguiller, the candidate of Lutte Ouvrière in presidential elections from 1974 to 2002.

for the front cover of *Rouge* a Krivine styled as James Bond 0036 . . . Even if we were not aware of it, this verdict spelled the end of the post-68 era.

The 1974 electoral campaign gave us the opportunity to publish a daily *Rouge* for a whole month. In the light of this experience, the idea of a revolutionary daily surfaced. *Libération* had been born the previous year. Italy sported three dailies of the radical left (*Il Manifesto*, *Lotta Continua* and *Avanguardia Operaia*). There was one in England.* The situation seemed propitious. In Portugal, the dictatorship had just been overthrown, during the French electoral campaign. In Spain, Franco's days were numbered and the fall of the regime seemed imminent. Britain and Italy were shaken by powerful strike waves.

The Portuguese situation particularly developed towards an embryonic dual power. Our sister section had held its founding congress in January 1974, just three months before the 'carnation revolution'. In October, I was invited there on a speaking tour for the anniversary of the Russian Revolution. Lisbon had the faded appearance of a decadent former colonial metropolis. Under the arcades of the venerable Praça de Comércio, in the Almoços e Jantares where Pessoa had been a regular, one could still imagine him conversing with his anarchist banker. During a meeting in Coimbra I met a young school student aged seventeen, Chico Louça,⁶ serious and elegant, who would become a friend for the next thirty years. I returned to Lisbon in April 1975, in the wake of the failed coup d'état of March and the fall of Spínola. Factory occupations were proliferating. Copcon officers went over to the side of the people and ran local crèches. Soldiers' committees were formed in the barracks. In Setúbal, a popular assembly grouping together all the organs of popular power seemed like an embryonic soviet.⁷ During the summer, tanks came out of the barracks and joined the demonstrators in the Lisbon streets. That was a major first for Europe, though of course it did not last very long.

We counted on a synchrony between the Portuguese situation and an imminent radicalisation in Spain. In October, Franco was already dying, but his agony was very spun-out. The Spanish press published detailed clinical reports, illustrated with medical diagrams. It seemed

* The author's reference is not to the *Morning Star*, but to *News Line*, the daily then published by the Workers' Revolutionary Party.

that the patriarch was only kept going by drips and tubes. In early November, the Basque comrades organised a training course at a farm on the Col de Roncevaux. It was freezing cold. Soup bubbled continuously in the communal kitchen. Over four days, while we followed the dictator's death hour by hour on the radio, we went over the revolutionary experiences of the century one by one, as if revising for an exam: the German revolution, the Spanish civil war, the Popular Fronts, the Chilean experience.

On 25 November, scarcely five days after Franco's death, a coup d'état by Amadora's commandos gave the signal for normalisation in Portugal. The synergy we had hoped for was not to be. Thanks to the Montpellier comrades and the organisational talents of Paul Alliès, our comrades in the Spanish state were able to hold their last underground congress in Languedoc in July 1976. Some of them arrived legally, others with false papers, others again – trusting more to the old smugglers' paths than to falsified documents – crossed the border over the mountains or by sea. After a great game of hide and seek with secondary rendezvous, reunions were highly charged with emotion. Many had emerged from the catacombs. The Basque prisoners, recently freed, discovered their new organisation. Confidence and enthusiasm were seemingly irresistible.

While Adolfo Suárez was managing the transition, we⁸ left for the festival at Ondarroa, the little Biscayan port where our comrades were solidly implanted. Nearly two hundred of us met up in fishing sheds, regaling ourselves on grilled tuna while listening to the vocal jousts of *bertxolaris*.⁹ When we emerged from a bar, processions formed with cries of '*Presoak Kalera! Euzkadi Azkatuta!*' One of these spontaneous demonstrations ended up in a pitched battle with the Guardia Civil. I tried to seize a carbine from the hands of one of these men with a characteristic *tricorne* leather hat, but I was out of luck. I had to run a gauntlet of blows on the back with rifle butts. It was not much of a punishment, and irrefutable proof that the dictatorship was no longer what it had been.

In France, the victory of the Union of the Left in the legislative elections of 1978 seemed likely. Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brezinski argued over the attitude to take towards the possible entry of the Communists into government in France or Italy. For our part, we wagered on the hypothesis of a Chilean-style scenario. In this eventuality, the traditional right would be sure to sabotage the experience, after the model of the bosses' strikes and *caserolazos* of autumn

1972 in Santiago. The far right would go for a strategy of tension as they had in Italy. We needed accordingly to prepare for this acceleration of class confrontation without delay.

The project of a daily *Rouge* saw the light amid this effervescence. Lenin had defined *Iskra* in 1903 as a 'collective organizer' that would arouse the whole of Russia. In spring 1975, we launched a national subscription to buy a printing press. The painter Matta gave us a canvas right off his easel. Yves Montand brought out of his pocket a bundle of notes that he handed stammering to Alain Krivine without even counting them. Michel Piccoli stood guarantee for the lease on the photo-typesetting apparatus. Alain and myself had the difficult task of soliciting Delphine Seyrig. For a whole afternoon we discussed the ills of the world without daring to broach the thorny question of the sinews of war. At the end of this over-long interview, it was she who wrong-footed us by producing a share certificate for some kind of printing cooperative (a front for a tiny Maoist organisation!).

Things were easier with Sartre. He received our representation in his apartment on the boulevard Raspail in a well-arranged ritual. Alain and myself again (never change a losing team . . .) made our pitch. After less than half an hour of shy assaults on our part, Simone de Beauvoir made her appearance (you could imagine that these interviews were carefully timed). Sartre then got out a chequebook and asked without ceremony how much we wanted. We broke down in tangled stammering, but he probably had his set rates.

Michel Rotman organised a meeting with Jean-Luc Godard. The director of *Le Mépris* and *Pierrot le fou* so intimidated me that I readily indulged his Maoist manias. After having let me persist in my subtle presentation of our project, he brusquely declared that a newspaper was necessarily a fascist project. Visibly delighted by my perplexity, he explained that the movement of a camera was like a caress around an image, while the mechanical gesture of the journalist striking the carriage of an Underwood or Remington was like that of striking a child. There was nothing to add.

In November 1975, preparations for the daily culminated in a great red festival in the great hall of La Villette. On the advice of architect friends, we had decided to brighten up the immense metal structure with a wavy and coloured false ceiling. For a whole week, teams of militants worked in relay to inflate thousands of multi-coloured balloons. Fifty thousand people flocked to the debates and spectacles. The programme was sumptuous. Dr Feelgood, Captain Beefheart,

Paco Ibañez, Catherine Ribeiro and many more followed one another on the main stage, while Jacques Higelin and Guy Bedos appeared at impossible hours on smaller platforms. Over seven hundred comrades mounted guard for three whole days and nights, shivering around improvised braziers on the Canal d'Ourcy. Our Latino comrades prepared a whole bathtub of *feijoade* which showed disturbing signs of fermentation. The Bretons supplied a lorry-load of oysters, the Montpelliérains a vat of wine and a large quantity of Pélardon cheese.

Edwy Plenel, appointed grand coordinator of the enterprise, vibrated in every direction, squabbled with the sound equipment company over their bill and called on a group from our security service to escort its arrival, desperately fearing a breakdown of the electricity generator that might cause fatal food poisoning for the vanguard assembled here.

Lacking both technical and journalistic experience, we did everything the wrong way round. Once the decision was made to launch a daily, we imagined the staffing situation would follow automatically. That was yet another demonstration of Guevarist voluntarism, and an act of faith in the virtues of exemplary action, this time applied to the journalistic guerrilla. We had acquired a rotary press, but we didn't have an operator. We'd bought photo-composition equipment, but didn't have compositors. We had installed telex, but the team had no professional journalists (apart from Bertrand Audusse, and Jean-Paul Besset who had worked on *La Montagne* in Clermont-Ferrand).^{*} The rotary press was finally in motion, and the keyboards delivered at the last minute, but we had no time to print a test issue. The first number appeared directly on the night of the first round of the cantonal elections of March 1976 – we were truly working without a safety net!

The risk was of breaking our necks. That historic Sunday turned to comedy. No one could work the system of corrections on perforated strips, the rolls of which hung from the wall like snakes at a fair. The supplier of the machines, gripped by compassion for our Brancalone army, spent nearly twenty-four hours at a stretch in a cubicle, his eyes riveted on the correction screen, finally emerging with his eyes red and bulging. Alain Krivine and myself, hastily

* Bertrand Audusse, French journalist, collaborator of *Le Monde*.

Jean-Paul Besset, born 1946, French journalist and politician. From 1974 to 1985, member of the LCR, member of the central committee and the politburo, then member of Les Verts. Since 2009 member of the European Parliament.

appointed as publishing directors, ran hair-dryer in hand to speed up the drying of the bromides over the shoulder of the layout people who were busy with the final corrections. By nightfall, delivery vans lined up in front of the premises like those of the Beagle Boys expecting a valuable shipment.

An audience of militants held its breath around the press. The emergence of the first rather stained sheets was greeted by an explosion of cheers, as fervent as if we had just won the World Cup or walked on the moon. Alas, the photogravure plates had not been the right size. When the machine reached cruising speed, they came away from the rollers and launched dangerously into flight like frisbees under our worried gaze. Despite all this, the Paris kiosks were supplied on time. Militants in Marseille or Toulon, however, rose early for nothing: we'd 'missed the provinces', and not for the last time. We had set off for nearly three years on a race against the clock, timed by the familiar clattering of telex machines.

Whether weekly or daily, *Rouge* appears in hindsight as a school of journalism that was at least as rigorous as the accredited institutions. By 1974, Hervé Chabalier, Bernard Guetta, Michel Field, Patrick Rotman and Dominique Pouchin had done part of their apprenticeship there.* The staff of the paper never reached as many as thirty.

Forced to work with such limited resources, the paper became our world, a horizon that we could not see beyond. After it went to press, we shared an evening meal at a cheap restaurant until a late hour of the night. After six days of paper-chase, we met up on Saturdays to play football in the Parc de Sceaux. To start with, inhibited by Jean-Marie Brohm's critique of competitive sport, we pretended this was just a playful exercise between teams (almost mixed!): there was no question of counting the goals. When it became clear that each player kept a scrupulous count in their head, the competitive spirit, officially banished, took the upper hand, and the games became more bitter.

This life in a goldfish bowl was not without its political danger, that of seeing the world through our own headlines and losing touch with reality. When the time came to draw up a balance sheet of our intervention in the legislative elections of 1978, it became clear, through arguments and misunderstandings, that the militants and

* Hervé Chabalier, JCR member, journalist, chief news editor of the public Antenne 2 TV channel. Creator of the CAPA agency.

Dominique Pouchin, member of PSU and then LCR. Journalist. Editorial director of *Libération* (1983-96).

their paper had not lived through the same history. Our editorial memory was one of front pages, headlines and subheads. That of the militants was rather one of actions, successful or otherwise, the distribution of leaflets, the signing of petitions, demonstrations and speeches at meetings. Memory on paper and memory of action: two significantly different visions, two temporal registers out of sync, two regimes of reality.

In spring 1976, I left for Madrid with Henri Weber to interview Fernando Claudin about Eurocommunism.* News of the legalisation of the Spanish Communist Party came during our visit. Lucía González and Jaime Pastor took us to a small reception organised for the occasion.† Santiago Carrillo made a short speech, then a kind of giant birthday cake made its appearance, swathed in pink sugar – rather like those in American films that might conceal a gangster with a submachine-gun.‡ In cutting this gastronomic pyramid, Henri managed to break off the enormous marzipan sickle, lovingly

* Fernando Claudin, 1915–90, in the Spanish Communist Youth from 1933, before going into exile in Mexico. Elected to the PCE central committee in 1960, and one of the five-strong secretariat. Together with Jorge Semprun, in 1964 he mounted an opposition to the general secretary Carrillo, favouring a broad opposition to Francoism. They were expelled, and returning to Spain after Franco's death, he joined the PSOE.

† Lucía González, 1947–2000, an activist of the Posadist Trotskyist current in the late 1960s. Played a significant role in the university struggles of these years. In 1969 she was forced to go into exile in Paris together with her partner Jaime Pastor. Subsequently a leader of the Spanish LCR, in which she was centrally responsible for feminist-movement work, to which she also gave a decisive contribution in the Spanish state. Died in 2000 after falling victim to cancer.

Jaime Pastor, born 1946, was a militant in the Frente de Liberación Popular, a Guevarist organisation very active on university campuses in the late 1960s. Was from 1967 to 1969 the main leader of the Democratic Students' Union of Madrid University (SDEUM) which played a leading role in the university struggle against Franco in that period. In 1969 he had to go into exile in Paris with his partner Lucía González. Both secretly returned in 1972. Was a leader of the Spanish LCR. Today active in the Izquierda Anticapitalista. Member of the editorial board of *Viento Sur*. Professor of political science at the Universidad Española de Educación a Distancia (UNED).

‡ Santiago Carrillo, 1915–2012, general secretary of the Spanish Socialist Youth in 1934, he was imprisoned during the Asturias insurrection. In 1936, in Moscow, he negotiated the merger of the Socialist and Communist Youth, before joining the Communist Party (PCE). On its politburo from 1937 onwards, he was the PCE general secretary 1960–82. A member of the Madrid defence junta during the civil war, he was responsible for militia organisation and public order. He led the continuing maquis struggle until its dissolution in 1952. After 1968, he was a proponent of 'Eurocommunism' and the reconciliation of the Spanish people, and after the failed 23 February 1981 anti-democratic coup d'état publicly praised King Juan Carlos's role in heading off the crisis. Expelled from the PCE in 1985, he created the Workers' Party of Spain – Communist Unity, most of which would ultimately join the social-democratic PSOE, though he himself did not.

entwined with its inseparable hammer, which crowned the construction. He brandished it triumphantly, as if biting into this symbol was a modest revenge for the Stalinist crimes of the civil war.

This time, the war was well and truly over. The Moncloa pact would very soon bury the Republic and its flag, in the name of a transition that established the constitutional monarchy of Juan Carlos and settled with the Franquist legacy. I returned to Madrid a year later, with Michel Rovère, to cover for *Rouge* the first general elections under the monarchy.* The final results were only known a month after the vote. The militant organisations of resistance to the dictatorship, the Communist Party and the far left, were marginalised in favour of a Socialist renewal that appeared from nowhere. The *desencanto* began.

In Portugal, the revolutionary sequence from April 1974 to November 1975 had also come to an end. In Britain, the strikes of 1974 had closed a cycle of struggle, and the neoliberal counter-offensive was under way. In Italy, the Communist Party reached its peak in the elections of 1976. Following the spectacular confrontations against the construction of the airport at Narita, the Japanese revolutionary left suffered brutal repression from which it never really recovered – its two major currents, Chukaku and Kakumaru, ending up murdering one another (literally) and becoming discredited. Our Japanese section, harshly affected by imprisonment and fines, was likewise in crisis.

In France, the left united around the *Programme commun* for government seemed the favourite in the legislative elections of spring 1978. This perspective maintained an illusory reprieve in the context of European reflux. The municipal elections of spring 1977 had recorded a breakthrough for the unitary lists of the far left that was both significant and unexpected. This contributed to alerting the Communist Party of the danger that an electoral victory might mean, if it appeared as a deferred effect of May 1968. In summer 1977, its leadership had begun a polemic with the Socialist Party over the figures in the *Programme commun*. This was only a pretext. Disunity

* Michel Rovère ('Thierry Jouvér'), 1952–2004, as a high-school student in autumn 1968 he joined the Ligue Communiste. A journalist for *Rouge* as a weekly then as a daily, ten years later becoming the director of *Inprecor*. In 1981 he took a job at the Rhône-Poulenc factory, working four eight-hour shifts a week at the same time as participating in the LCR central committee, with particular focus on its economics working group. In his last years he made professional use of his expertise on works commissions.

led to electoral defeat in March 1978. For François Mitterrand, the game had been delayed to his advantage: according to the electoral logic of the Fifth Republic, while a victory in the legislative elections would have held him captive to his allies, a victory in the subsequent presidential election would allow him to shape the parliamentary majority as he wished. His election in 1981 took place in a different context, after the workers' movement had suffered major defeats (such as that in the steel industry), after the 'recentring' of the CFDT which took its distance from political parties, and the beginning of the neoliberal counter-offensive in the United States and the United Kingdom.*

The victory of the right in 1978, on the other hand, dealt a mortal blow to *Rouge quotidien*. At the next editorial meetings, we discussed the crisis that had just struck the Italian left organisations. The launch of the paper had been a kind of wager on the conjuncture that a hypothetical victory of the left might have inaugurated. Sales were around 10,000 to 12,000 copies. It wasn't chickenfeed, but the post-electoral depression risked making the deficit unsustainable. The technical developments under way in the press would deliver the coup de grâce and sweep away the most stubborn hopes of survival. With the appearance of facsimiles, the printing of the national press was decentralised; no more vans making the night-time journeys from Paris. While we were printing the paper at the least possible cost, thanks to an accepted self-exploitation on the part of journalists, machinists, keyboard operators and compositors, it was prohibitive to print a few hundred copies each in Marseille, Toulouse or Brest.¹⁰

We had to be able to end a daily, despite the iron in our soul.

It meant admitting a defeat that was political and symbolic, but also financial. It is one thing to collect money for a project that inspires enthusiasm, something else and far harder to seek money to pay one's debts. We had to (self-)dismiss almost the whole staff. Even in a situation where the fear of unemployment did not weigh so heavily as it does today, the dispersal of the team involved individual anxieties. It contributed to the ambient moroseness and dejection.

In the Montreuil premises, yesterday humming, the telex fell silent like a heart that suddenly stops beating. For a whole year of unhappy

* CFDT: Today one of the two largest trade-union federations in France, it was created in 1964 by the majority secular wing of the old Catholic unions. Around the period of May 68 its leadership was close to the PSU and the idea of workers' self-management but now very moderate politically.

memory, I was in charge of managing the reconversion of the daily into a new weekly, and coordinating the management of the various companies (newspaper and book publication, printing, bookshop), each in a critical situation. The whole edifice threatened to collapse like a house of cards. The weekly managerial meeting was spent in deploying resources to avoid bankruptcy, making ends meet at the month end by way of special subscriptions or loans from militants, and transferring debts from one company to another. The situation was so tense that the person responsible for publications or bookshops would sometimes 'forget' to sign their cheque to the printing company, in order to gain a few days and make other creditors wait.

One era was coming to an end. A new one was opening, full of uncertainties. We had to imagine new projects.

The impulse came from the leadership team of the International.¹¹ Its logic was simple. After a long detour by way of the colonial revolution, 'the epicentre of the world revolution' was returning to the heart of capitalist accumulation, where it would rediscover its 'classic' forms. As heirs to the first congresses of the Communist International, our sections should be like fish in the water. On two conditions: working to gather together the Trotskyist diaspora, and radically transforming their social composition.

This orientation, for the unification of Trotskyist movements and a voluntarist proletarianisation (known as the 'industrial turn' in the jargon of the American comrades), did not arouse unanimous enthusiasm within the Ligue. Some of the leadership were worried about the workerist demagoguery that began to arise, still more by a possible rapprochement with the Lambertist current, supposedly the natural reunion of a family that had too long been divided.¹²

The whole thing started badly. Weakened by the end of the daily, the Ligue was suffering a kind of hangover. For many militants, the time had come to begin their professional life. The rival Lambertist organisation had developed an entrism column within our ranks, comprising a few dozen militants steered from outside by Jean-Christophe Cambadélis.¹³ In these distorted conditions, a merger would have been deadly. The Nicaraguan revolution of July 1979 prevented such a catastrophic scenario. Following its tradition, the Ligue's immediate reflex was to identify with a revolution under way and support it to the hilt, despite its limitations, failings, or our criticisms of its leadership. This reflex came fully into play. François Sabado, one of the most fervent champions in our ranks of the

unification of the Trotskyist movement, returned passionately Sandinista from a stay in Managua in August 1979.* This unexpected event put our discussions of doctrine to the test of reality. At the preparatory conference for the 11th World Congress, held in the autumn in a gymnasium in L'Haÿ-les-Roses, delegates representing around four hundred militants theatrically broke with the Ligue. Some of them did so reluctantly. Old friendships were broken in this bad imitation of the great historic splits. Present on the stands as invited observers, Cambadélis and Luis Favre could contemplate the damage with satisfaction.† The haemorrhage might have been fatal for us, but on the contrary it triggered a salutary about-turn.

That was the epilogue to a decade during which we had worked wonders, exhausting ourselves in running faster than our own shadow. The Ligue had certainly won the beginnings of a social implantation that enabled it to resist the bad years of the 1980s. It had accumulated experiences of struggle and done its social apprenticeship. It had worried the bureaucratic apparatus in the CGT, contributed to the construction of a left in the CFDT, renewed the traditions of the old *École Émancipée* tendency in the teaching unions.‡ Whether carried away by the activist maelstrom of exemplary actions, or overwhelmed by the fateful deadlines of our daily press, our small group of 'professional conspirators' had not fully shared in this change that was still under way. We had remained on the margin of new cultural transformations, editorial quarrels and musical fashions.

Under the pressure of an urgency that was partly imagined, the 1970s were more fertile in political polemics than theoretical reflection, more occupied by strategies of struggle for power than by the patient critique of political economy.

In 1975, Éditions Stock suggested I should write with Henri Weber a book on 'revolution and power'. The editor in charge of this series,

* François Sabado (Arafat, Ollivier), a lycée student in the Ligue Communiste, then employed in a factory during the LCR's second 'turn to industry'. Member of the political bureau of the LCR and the Fourth International, lately in the NPA leadership.

† Luis Favre (real name: Felipe Belisario Wermus), born 1949, Brazilian politician of Argentine origin, member of Política Obrera. While living in France joined the Lambertist OCI and worked in its international department. In 1985 moved to Brazil, broke with Lambertism and became a collaborator of the international department of the PT.

‡ *École émancipée*: Trade-union and pedagogical journal appearing from 1910 onwards, organ of CGT and then CGTU teachers. After the 1936 reunification, it was the organ of the union current of the same name holding to revolutionary syndicalism. Today one of the left currents in the FSU, the main teachers' union.

Jean-Claude Barreau, no doubt imagined a lively text, compact like a pamphlet. After Henri pulled out, I delivered a great tome, which Régis Debray told me was big enough for three books (at least!): a reflection on the institutional relations of power, a balance sheet on Stalinism in the twentieth century, and an attempt to synthesise strategic experiences. Before losing myself in the everyday molecular life of the paper, I had probably tried to draw conclusions from a tumultuous decade, and the inventory of the disparate baggage accumulated over the years.

The first part of this indigestible concoction attested to the influence of Michel Foucault. *Discipline and Punish* had just appeared, and the first volume of *A History of Sexuality* was announced for autumn 1976. Deleuze and Guattari's 'rhizome', the trailer for *A Thousand Plateaus*, was published the same year. The distinction between state, 'power effects', 'games of power', 'relations of power', pervaded the air of the time. The tone was set by my very first lines in *La Révolution et le Pouvoir*:

The first proletarian revolution brought its response to the problem of the state. Its degeneration had left us with the problem of power. The state is to be destroyed and its machinery broken. Power is to be undone, in its institutions and subterranean anchorings (particularly the division of labour). How can the struggle by which the proletariat constitutes itself as the ruling class contribute to this? We have to take up the analysis of the crystallizations of power in capitalist society, follow their resurgence in the bureaucratic counter-revolution, seek in the struggle of the exploited classes the tendencies by which the socialization (the withering away) of power may prevail over the statization of society.

A journey followed through the various forms of institutional mesh: school, the army, the judicial system, the press, the family. Certain guardians of an imagined orthodoxy criticised me for trying to dissolve the question of the state (to be smashed) into that of a network of powers to be unpicked.

The fifty pages (out of 430) of the final chapter, titled 'Militant worries', brought me far more in the way of disputes. Under the pressure of radical feminism and the nascent gay movement, the crisis of the 'militant ideal'¹⁴ became a subject of concern. Under the pretext that 'everything is political', a new normative discourse claimed to

abolish by decree the distinction between public and private, and imperatively dictate the liberated behaviour of the exemplary militant, male and female. I naturally recognised that a militant who refused to change personal life, beginning with their own, 'did not bear within them the revolt needed to carry their choice to the end'. But I also suspected, behind the rhetoric of desiring machines, the announcement of postmodern sloppiness: 'Today people talk of being fragmented: the derisory aspiration of a torn person amazed to see their own splinters fly through the air.'

In a somewhat heroised depiction of the militant adventurer, I cited a passage from *Rendez-Vous manqués*¹⁵ in which Régis Debray pays homage to Pierre Goldmann: 'Militants do not tell their life stories. Between what has been experienced and what can be spoken, between the personal and the political, there has always been a barrier. Whether accessible or abrupt, militants move through life – including their own – like an iceberg: the greater part is below the water-line.' This tone, very 'lonesome cowboy', brought me a (deserved) thrashing from feminist comrades, in particular the brilliant Frédérique Vinteuil,¹⁶ who mercilessly flayed the nostalgias and ambiguities of an enlightened (by candlelight) macho.

She was largely right, but I was not completely wrong. A good quarter of a century later, I remain convinced that it was an illusion, often painful and sometimes deadly, to pretend to strip off the 'old Adam' (or the young Eve) by decree, in order to expose them, naked as worms, to the pale lights of the age. Excited by an inflation of the image, the fearsome narcissistic desire for 'transparency' and 'visibility' was at work.¹⁷ The more robust could stand being stripped naked quite well. Others did not survive this.

The discreetly totalitarian formula of 'everything is political' has its (little) share of truth, on condition of immediately making clear: to a certain degree and up to a certain point. The division between private and public is certainly a mark of the specific alienation of a commodity society of generalised division and duplicity: each individual is internally split, on the model of the commodity (split into use-value and exchange-value) or of labour (split into concrete and abstract). But this intimate cleavage is also a protection against everyday aggression, against relations of personal submission and dependence, against totalitarian forms of control and domination.

My three years of hibernation in the cocoon of *Rouge quotidien* immediately followed *La Révolution et le Pouvoir*. They ended with

the publication in 1979 of *L'Anti-Rocard ou les haillons de l'utopie*. I sought here to flush out the neoliberal logic at work in the Rocardian 'second left's' rhetoric of modernisation, which with the help of the CFDT 're-centring' and media backing, pretended to have triumphed over the ruins of the first. The manoeuvre, however, was premature. At the Metz congress of the Socialist Party, Mitterrand was able to skilfully reject it, with the help of Jean-Pierre Chevènement. Endowed with a better sense of history than his hasty challengers, he understood that the balance of forces did not (yet) make emancipation from the Union of the Left possible, at least not before cutting the Communist Party down to size and definitively reducing it to a subaltern position. Which was achieved after 1981.

With its arguments about the state, Eurocommunism, market democracy and the notion of hegemony, *L'Anti-Rocard* closed the cycle of the 1970s' strategic polemics. Contrary to the predictions of André Glucksmann in his period as open-mouthed apologist for the Cultural Revolution, it was the west wind that now prevailed over the east. It even began to blow at gale force in the United States and Great Britain. To decipher the hieroglyphs of the present, the time had then come to return from Trotsky and Lenin to the 'critique of political economy'. To read (or re-read) Marx, in order to submit the theoretical foundations to the test of a changing era.

Duck or Rabbit?

They wanted facts. Facts! They demanded facts from him, as if facts could explain anything!

— Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*

It is admirable how settled opinions are drawn from unsettled facts.

— André Suarès

God exists only for writers of newspaper editorials.

— Graham Greene

Convinced that every era possesses its own forms of writing, and shocked by the contempt that writers feel for reporters, the Russian critic Tetryakov saw newspapers as the epic of our time. He wanted to raise 'the non-invented literature of the fact' above invented belles-lettres. Journalism, for him, 'was what the Bible was for the peasant of the Middle Ages, or the didactic novel for the liberal Russian intelligentsia'. Whether fortnightly, weekly or daily, *Rouge* was satisfied with more modest ambitions. Without challenging such models of the genre as Péguy's *Cahiers* or Kraus's *Die Fackel*, it sought to remain an 'anti-newspaper', and resist the fragmentation of the world.

The very existence of a periodical can conflict with its status as a bringer of news. It is harder for it to escape its fate as a commodity. It is sold and bought; that is the law of the opinion market. And so it was not for want of talent that *Rouge quotidien* expired. It was on the contrary a nursery of vocations, an experimental school, whose pupils learned to work wonders with next to nothing. With neither advertising nor sponsors, with no other capital than the devotion of its editorial team, a militant press survives under a financial sword of Damocles, constantly torn between the stereotypes of a propagandist wooden language and a servile imitation of the so-called 'press of record'.

Despite a tenacious distrust of the professional tendencies of the 'journalistic party',¹ I have always scribbled for marginal sheets, from *L'Allumeur du Belvédère*² via *Inprecor*³ to *Rouge*. The confidentiality of print figures gives protection from the temptations of celebrity. My first interview in *L'Allumeur*, in 1963, was with Jacques Maritain, an old gentleman wrapped up against the cold in a Mallarmé-style plaid, who had retired to a Dominican monastery in Toulouse.* We spoke of his spiritual trajectory and the Algerian war. The paper's subtitle was *Un parterre de myosotis sur un fleuve de pétrole* (A bed of forget-me-nots on a river of petrol). Not a surefire way to boost sales!

My reservations towards journalistic practices were not about those risks of the trade most often denounced: material corruption, the effects of connivance and promiscuity, the game of appearances. They rather concerned the impersonal logic of the production of information, the ambiguities of the journalistic timescale, the race for scoops, the frenzy of zapping, the dilution of history into news. The daily rhythm leads easily to confusing anecdote and event, the insignificant item with the unnoticed element destined to gain prominence over time. Kraus ironically wrote that, with news changing every day, journalism has a different truth each day. Thinking, like truth, has its rhythms, and reflection its slownesses. They do not fit at all well with the hunt for the exclusive and the hysterical race against the clock. They have their own depth of field, which scarcely goes together with the striking front page.

Edwy Plenel did his apprenticeship on *Rouge quotidien*. After his military service, he opted in 1973 for the career he felt as an irresistible vocation, joining first *Le Matin* and then *Le Monde*. With an indisputable talent in terms of liveliness, memory and writing that has been amply confirmed over the years, he liked to say that he could practise this trade without succumbing to its mirages. Twenty years later we tried to draw a balance sheet of this wager in a little book of dialogue under the title *La Canard et le Lapin. Le journalisme et ses critiques*.⁴ The book was two-thirds finished, typeset, laid out and announced to the bookstores, when an unexpected incident put a premature end to it. It never appeared. The actual circumstances matter little. It was quite simply a project that could not come to fruition. In twenty years, the gap had grown between two visions of the

* Jacques Maritain, 1882–1973, Catholic philosopher and Christian Democrat thinker. Opposed secular humanism in the name of his own 'integral humanism'.

world and two forms of engagement. An old friendship made up of many shared actions and secrets was no longer enough to cover this. The exercise at least provided us with the opportunity to explore the roots of the difference.

Intellectual execration of the media is not something recent. If it is more virulent than ever today, this is probably due to the media's ever-growing power, which goes increasingly together with the power of wealth. Perception of its social function, however, constantly swings between the heroising of the journalist as bringer of justice, and resentment towards pens and voices that are servile to a master of doubtful legitimacy.

There is an old conflict between the 'intellectual power' of the philosopher, master of truth, and the 'media power' of the sophist, venal demagogue and drum-beater on the opinion market. It is still far from attenuating. If the sophist maintains a suspect relationship with commerce, he none the less defends, in the face of an aristocratic and potentially tyrannical truth, the conditions of a democratic plurality. If the philosopher is tempted by the authoritarian exercise of his knowledge, he reminds us none the less that numbers and print runs have little to do with the concern for truth. Gide already claimed that thousands of readers necessarily meant a misunderstanding was at work.

What is new in today's passionate controversy over press and media responsibilities is thus not just the liveliness of polemics. It is rather a matter of the explosive collusion between an intellectual critique, emanating from the academic world, and a militant critique, exasperated by the anaemia of the public space and by growing inequality vis-à-vis the production and distribution of information.

The elitist critique made its appearance at the dawn of the modern age, in reaction to the eruption of the 'masses' into the reserved domains of politics and culture. Often anti-democratic, at least it unmasked, in its early days, certain vices that would go on to glorious prosperity. The Encyclopaedists saw journalism as 'the vilest of literatures'. Balzac perceived it as an *embourgeoisement* and 'daily erosion of thought'. Enslaved to the fetish of the written word, the author already tended to mutate into a mere 'phrasemonger'. Under the Second Empire, with the new alliance 'between ink and money'⁵ (between the press and the stock exchange), a new configuration of the public space took shape. Information and speculation now

appeared organically tied. And Mallarmé could even rail against the despotism of print runs, which already heralded the still more tyrannical one of opinion polls and audience figures.

As far back as 1909, the *Nouvelle Revue Française* called for a 'struggle against journalism, Americanism, commercialism and our era's self-complacency'. Karl Kraus and Viennese criticism denounced, in the intimate tie woven between public opinion and the market, the source of an inauthentic subjectivity, which circulated like an adulterated commodity among other commodities. Musil grieved to see newspapers become markets and stores, instead of 'test beds of the mind'. He denounced the invasion of the journalistic spirit into the novel, and the proliferation of novelist-journalists who sold their signature as much as their work. 'Journalism', Kraus drily summed up, 'thinks without the pleasure of thinking.'

Ambivalent after the model of romantic critiques of modernity, these fierce polemics were a confused mixture of pertinent social criticism of mental commodification and an 'artistic critique' nostalgic for a lost distinction and aura.⁶

The resentment of the 'intellectual power' towards the media power no longer has completely the same wellsprings. It expresses above all the frustrations of an inferior *noblesse de robe* or a lower academic clergy, who resent the massification of intellectual work as a deskilling, even a humiliation. To the emblematic figure of the intellectual as legislator, who makes or inspires the law, Zygmunt Bauman therefore opposes the proletarianised plebeian intellectual as simply an unskilled manipulator of signs.

Journalists sometimes complain that the intellectual charge against the press adopts the tone of a police literature of suspicion. However disagreeable it may be, this procedure, which emphasises networks of friendship, self-interested acquaintanceships, casual affinities, the little sentence that speaks more than it intended, the artificial assembly of disparate elements that ends up becoming a system, only turns back against the media their investigatory frenzy: 'The whole truth on what they try and hide from you!' If the journalist then complains at being the target of an intellectual police with neither rules nor code, the critical sociologist can legitimately retort that the journalist engages in sociology every day, without 'the rules of method', practises politics without giving an account to electors or militants, and philosophises spontaneously without subjecting himself to the painful labour of the concept.

Paying homage to Karl Kraus, as typical representative of the 'old-style intellectual' threatened by the eruption of the 'new-style intellectuals', Pierre Bourdieu said: 'Similarly to today, the boundaries between the journalistic field and the intellectual field were in the process of shifting at that time.' Criticism and imprecation scarcely help to explain the logic of these shifts and the stakes involved in them. An inextricable confusion results between a conservative aristocratic critique of the institution and a radical social critique.

Both Kraus and Wittgenstein were treated as conservatives in their day. According to Jacques Bouveresse, 'because they deliberately chose to lag behind their age, this has not yet caught up with them today.'⁷ An irony of uneven and combined development, or a ruse of contradiction and return, transforming the rearguard into a vanguard . . . The last in this way turn out to be first. When the question is to rescue tradition from the conformism that threatens it, conservatism is not a sin. The whole question is to know what is worthwhile saving and what is to be done with it.

The ambivalence of critique of the media can actually conceal an oblique criticism of democracy and politics in general. The dividing line, however, does not run between a rabble of intellectuals jealous of their devalued symbolic capital, and an intrepid tribe of journalists exploring sword in hand the unknown territories of a new age. György Lukács was not satisfied with banal denunciation of the corruption of thinking by money and power. Without ignoring the occasional greats, he located the miseries of journalism in the general forms of abstract labour and commodity reification. Yet even he underestimated the way in which this lack of conviction can appear in the guise of peremptory intransigence and dogmatic eclecticism, or can find compensation in the fetishism of detail.⁸

Polemic and denunciation in pamphlet form can have their usefulness. They also have their limitations. Nizan's pamphlet against the 'guard dogs' (*Les Chiens de garde*) poured boiling oil on university philosophy and the savant apes of academic power. It hardly had any place for subtlety on the philosophies of Bergson or Brunschvig. But it did not dispense anyone from reading them . . . There are good journalists and bad, as there are good and bad professors. But the institutional logic of the educational system or of journalism is not reducible to the algebraic sum of their virtues and vices, or to the intentions and qualities of their agents.

If some vehement criticisms of journalism today betray a doubt about the very foundations of democracy, this is because this democracy is well and truly ill. Frustration towards the media is one symptom among others, which include electoral abstention, social disaffiliation, and the denigration of politics.⁹ Democratic life gives signs of languor and suffers from dizziness. It is the victim of the generalised privatisation of the world and the anaemia of the public space. Its procedural formalism conceals ever more poorly, behind virtuous democratic professions of faith, the reality of a system of plebiscitary oligarchy. Emptied of real issues, public debate becomes a mirage of appearances and enticements, a simulacrum of deliberation without any power of decision.

The presentation, by way of spectacle, of a *trompe-l'oeil* choice, reduced to the expression of a capricious individual subjectivity – ‘That’s my choice!’ as the French trash TV programme puts it – is significant. The formula could serve as a maxim for postmodern anti-politics.

Everyone their own choice! And everyone at home!

Since there can be no discussion of taste, colours or choices.

Rather than wax indignant or give in to despair at the abuses of media (or judicial) power, it is better to put their historical development in perspective, in parallel with that of common sense and public opinion, and their incestuous relationship with money and politics. The French revolution established a new public space. The Belgian revolution of 1830 was actually described as a ‘press revolution’. In the early 1840s, the young Marx saw the free press as ‘the eye of the spirit of the people, open everywhere’, ‘the spiritual mirror in which a people regards itself’. This critical reflexivity was seen by him as the first precondition for political wisdom. Philosophy thus found its way into journalism in order to act as press correspondent and bring to light, by ‘the public exercise of reason’, the wonders and phantasmagoria of the commodity.¹⁰

What made the press at that time ‘the most powerful lever of culture’ was its capacity to ‘transform the material combat into a combat of ideas’. Yet an unresolved incompatibility persisted, between the freedom of speech and writing that in theory governed the public space, and the despotic absolutism of private property that was exercised in practice. This fundamental contradiction has ever since been resolved in favour of the latter.

Common sense, which was critical in the age of Enlightenment, became apologetic to the extent that the post-revolutionary public

space was institutionalised. It is viewed today as crude or impolite to speak of the bourgeois press or bourgeois democracy, as if the adjective was a mark of infamy. Not that it has anything in the way of homage about it, but it does not necessarily imply a value judgement. There is indeed a bourgeois press, in terms of its conditions of production (material, financial, ideological), as there is a trade-union and a militant press. To recall this in no way prevents distinguishing between a well-conducted paper and a rag, an enlightened bourgeoisie and an obscurantist one, a competent enemy such as Raymond Aron and such shoddy ideologists as Jean-François Revel and Bernard-Henri Lévy.* If all newspapers were the same shade of grey, it would no longer be worth the trouble of reading them (let alone buying them).

By the late nineteenth century, the concentration of the printing, press and publishing market highlighted, especially in the United States, the cohabitation between money and information, increasingly subjecting the press to a criterion of profitability. In *The Brass Check*, published in 1919, Upton Sinclair already railed against the fact that journalism had become one of the ways in which 'the industrial autocracy exercises a stranglehold over political democracy'. Although the *New York Times* refused to mention the book, even rejecting paid advertisements, it sold more than a hundred and fifty thousand copies. Viewing journalism as a class institution, Sinclair emphasised the drift from a critical press to an information business. He hoped that this ominous tendency could still be counteracted by the power of journalists' and printworkers' unions. He even took the initiative in a subscription to establish an independent and 'honest weekly', the *National News*.

In the interwar years, the main resistance to the barbaric celebrations of capital and information was the demand for professionalism and objectivity, as illustrated by a number of characters in *romans noirs*. This heroic ideal of the redresser of wrongs, twin brother of the

* Jean-François Revel, 1924–2006, journalist and essayist, with columns in *l'Oeil*, *France-Observateur*, *L'Express*, and *Le Point*. Theorised the death of philosophy and states' right to intervene in other countries for humanitarian reasons. Many of his works were publishing successes, even internationally. Broke to the Right of the Socialists in 1970.

Bernard-Henri Lévy, ('BHL'), born 1948, philosopher. One of the so-called 'Nouveaux philosophes'. Close to Maoism as a student, then an adviser to Mitterrand, he became a public intellectual and habitual contrarian, speaking out, among others, in defence of WWII-era pope Pius XII, Benedict XVI, Israel's 2008 war in Gaza, Dominique Strauss-Kahn (accused of sexually assaulting a New York hotel maid) and Proletari Armati per il Comunismo refugee Cesare Battisti's fight not to be extradited back to Italy.

solitary private eye up against a corrupt police force, was fuelled by the hope that the tie between the business logic of the proprietor and the editorial logic of the journalist could (still) be broken. Ethical codes, engraving in marble the rules of the trade, illustrate this positivist catechism applied to the manufacture of public opinion.¹¹ After the Cold War and the McCarthy period, this defence of professionalism had a certain success. But the wind began to turn again in the 1970s. With the beginnings of the neoliberal counter-offensive, neo-conservative criticism then set out to denounce the exorbitant grip of journalists over information and their responsibility for the United States' debacle in Vietnam. This accusation expressed a growing fusion between political and financial interests.

The explosion of communications technologies has endowed the media with a force besides which the means of counter-information (militant press, radio, books, alternative networks) seem derisory. The 'fourth estate' maintains such a close relationship with the power of capital that it is increasingly hard to imagine counter-powers able to face up to it. Jaurès's *L'Humanité* could still claim to struggle on an (almost) equal footing with *L'Aurore* or *Le Figaro* of the time. The doctrine of asymmetrical warfare no longer applies only to weapons of mass destruction. The fate of most free radio stations, the chronic difficulty of the political press, the mortality rate of ephemeral bulletins and gazettes, all illustrate today the structural imbalance of forces in play in the field of information. But no matter how fragile and vulnerable, counter-powers, subaltern to the power that dominates them while waiting to crush them, are still as necessary as ever. On condition that we have no illusions as to their limitations.

In 2000, AOL bought Time Warner for US\$160 billion (more than a third of the United States's annual defence budget, and twice that of the Chinese!). Just as there is a military-industrial complex, so the mass of capital invested in media production today contributes to the formation of a media-financial complex. Groups such as Lagardère, Bouygues, Dassault, and other Pinaults that straddle the interface between business and communication, weave opaque connections between these two bulimic complexes. Companies that have made their fortune in piping and the lucrative business of water supply are naturally interested in cables and fibre-optics. It's another kind of network.¹²

Taking control of a 'major press group', Carlos Ghosn, the 'saviour' of Renault, did not mince words: 'The written press is like a grocer's shop, it only needs simple recipes.' Selling, targeting, investing,

dividing up the market: the jargon of marketing invades this pitiless world. The capitalist concentration of the media very clearly has reverse effects on the organisation of the profession and its practices. In a study on journalism today, the sociologist Alain Accardo speaks of a 'new proletarianization' and a 'precarious intelligentsia'. In 1998, out of 29,000 accredited journalists, casual workers already made up more than 20 per cent, up by more than a third since the start of the decade. The appearance of free papers can only strengthen this trend. The professional frustration this leads to is all the more painful in that the trade remains crowned with its past social prestige.

In the society of the spectacle, spectacular media . . .

It would certainly be naïve to imagine a relationship of direct dependence between financial and editorial logic. Information, as a commodity, has to reconcile its useful function with its commercial profitability. A purely propaganda press, satisfied with inculcating a state or business ideology, would rapidly become ideologically useless. If readers did still read it, for want of anything better, they would decipher it like Orwellian Newspeak, as was often the case in the Eastern bloc countries subject to bureaucratic censorship: turning the message around. The relationship between the content of information and its economic conditions of production is more a matter of structural causality than a linear one, of conditioning more than command. This is the true secret of the power of capital. Its domination is all the more absolute for being impersonal.

In the age of neoliberal globalisation, perhaps it is inevitable to make ever more compromising compromises with the law of the market. Instead of hiding these by wrapping oneself in an increasingly flouted ethical code, it is better to be honest about the situation, even if at the price of a certain cynicism. This at least makes it possible to discuss openly the limits of the acceptable.

The argument according to which journalism can remain an honest trade, with its rules, observances, customs and obligations, everything that makes for a professional community, a guild or a corporation in the old sense of the term, is hardly convincing. Kraus revealed very early on an unconscious hypocrisy: 'It is remarkable to see how far journalists present an honest idea of their trade when it is attacked, and with what effrontery they pride themselves as the wisdom of the world when they recommend themselves to readers and think they are alone with them.'¹³

Attributing itself old artisanal virtues, journalism claims usages and qualities that militancy is said to have lost. The militant is supposedly

prey to the routine of ready-made thinking and doctrinaire repetition, while the journalist remains open to the test of the new, and attentive to the questions of reality. He has over the former the advantage of still being capable of wonder at the mysteries of the world, and of being surprised by the unexpected.

This parallel is odious. Journalism (which?) and militancy (which?) do not involve the same practices or the same criteria. To criticise the one for keeping reality at a distance in order to protect its certainties, while the other, free from any dogmatic prejudices, freely confronts a world stripped to its pristine nakedness, is in the best case naïve, if not straightforwardly dishonest. It is rather a matter of two distinct approaches, two representations of the real, and two ways of constructing and deconstructing it. The real opposition between the professional journalist and the militant publicist lies elsewhere. The first is always content with interpreting the world, the second tries also to change it. That is the whole difference between a speculative reading of reality and a critique exposed to the test of its own practice.

The two things do not belong to the same order, and do not share the same criteria. To take a distance from the world of militancy (and the doctrinaire certainties ascribed to it) also means freeing oneself from its constraints, without for all that coming any closer to the real. The belief that it is possible in sovereign fashion to write and dominate a newspaper means persisting in the illusion of the Cartesian subject, master and possessor of its object, whereas it is rather the newspaper that makes you. This is the 'river Kwai effect'. In Pierre Boulle's novel, Colonel Nicholson wants to build the best bridge possible. He thinks and dreams bridges, but he forgets why and for whom he is taking so much care on the construction. The journalist likewise, prey to the mania of his trade, wants to produce the best newspaper. He is not collaborating with an occupying power, he simply wants to do his particular work well. He becomes a fetishist of the paper, as Nicholson was a fetishist of the bridge, or Pierre Bérégovoy a fetishist of the '*franc fort*'.* His work is certainly useful

* Pierre Bérégovoy, 1925-93, an engineering worker and train driver, then a technician at Gaz-de-France (and its deputy director from 1978). In the Resistance with the Socialist Youth, and the SFIO from 1946. In the Parti Socialiste Autonome, then the PSU, then the Union des clubs pour le renouveau de la gauche, he ultimately joined the Parti Socialiste. Several times a minister under the Mitterrand presidency, he initiated the deregularisation of the financial sector. He was prime minister in 1992-93, and committed suicide shortly after resigning.

to the reader – otherwise he would no longer be read – but it also serves to carry ideological divisions and weapons, as the bridge carries material ones.

Here we come to the heart of ideological manufacture. ‘Reality’ is never self-evident. It never finds a faithful reflection in words, whether printed or not. A world in which newspaper and reality are one would be literally paranoid, close to the world of Karl Kraus’s satirical verse:

The press was there at the beginning of time,
And then the world came about . . .

What is fundamentally irritating about the false modesty of professional journalism is the exorbitant claim to represent a totality with no concept, to arrogate the standpoint of God without the power of creation. A few years ago, an advertising campaign involuntarily revealed the same kind of arrogance in a kind of gigantic communication version of the Freudian slip. Large posters in the Paris Métro passageways proclaimed: ‘When you don’t know everything, you don’t know anything!’ What social contempt there is in this formula. What disdain for the partial knowledge and knowhow of everyday. The sleepwalking workers waiting for their train will never know everything; so they are supposed not to know anything. They just have to sheepishly sink their head in their shoulders and hug the walls.

‘Reality’ is multiple, and highly problematic. There is an immediate, empirical reality, a tautological one, that of facts that ‘are facts’, ‘facts as naked as facts can be’, as Joseph Conrad put it. This authoritarian reality, before which there is nothing to be done but accept, is beyond debate. But there is also a scientific reality, in which facts are constructed and make sense in the light of a theory. There are also symbolic and aesthetic realities, not to mention the reality of those possibilities that are not unreal. Naked reality, as presupposed by journalistic objectivity, is that of ideological empiricism. Detached from the totality of its determinations, an immediate given of the journalistic consciousness is no more than a bad and arrogant abstraction that seeks to pass as the concrete. To unravel the intricacies of the totality does not mean, as is often believed, ‘de-realising’ the obscenity of naked facts in order to revise them or dress them up just as one likes. It means, on the contrary, embarking on a perilous

sifting of evidence. Beyond the mirror there are always other possible realities, and other real possibilities.

The dispute over the meaning of the real is the same thing as the dispute over the fetishism of the fact. Gestalt psychology uses the well-known test of the duck and the rabbit. If you look at a drawing one way, you see a rabbit with big upturned ears. If you look at it another way, you see a duck with its beak open. Duck or rabbit? Or rather, duck and rabbit. It is hard for different points of view on reality to reach agreement. The world is this, and that, and many other things as well. If it were not, everything would be simple, clear and transparent, faithfully reflected by a univocal discourse washed clean of any ambiguity.

The illusion of the 'true small fact' and factual evidence is needed for the journalist's good conscience. Wittgenstein lampooned this 'revelling in fact'. Foucault, on the other hand, said in 1978 that he had been 'seized by the anger for facts'. He proclaimed himself a journalist and declared war on systems conceived to absorb and digest everything without allowing themselves to be disturbed or surprised. His attitude was revelatory of a period of transition, of the crumbling of bearings, of political and intellectual crisis. It became urgent to 'free political action from any form of unitary and totalizing paranoia'.¹⁴ Scarcely two years later, the same Foucault once more made fun of the stereotype of 'true small facts against vague great ideas', and of 'the champion of exactitude stuck in his own approximations'.

There is indeed, in the fragmented timescales of journalism, a recurrent tendency to the fetishism of facts, foolish and stubborn as they are. It is this foolishness of facts, unable to explain anything, that hobbles Lord Jim and renders him mute before his judges at the trial over the *Patna* shipwreck. The establishment and checking of facts certainly is crucially important, true as it is that discourse always has to render account to reality. But inquiry (in the methodical sense that John Dewey gave it) is not just geared to the work of recording, but also to one of agency, combination and evaluation. Just as a cookery recipe is not simply the sum of its ingredients, so a newspaper is not a collage of facts to which an editorial mind is added as a kind of supplement. Like judicial controversy or the presentation of a scientific experiment, it is actively created. The front page, the headline, the hierarchy of information, illustrations and captions, the choice and place of op-ed pieces and readers' letters, all contribute to it. The

effects of distortion and concealment that result from this are not the work of a conspiracy or plot. The media unconscious is more subtle than that. By depoliticising the *fait accompli*, the production of information manufactures public opinion on a large scale.

A 'scientific community' is recognised as such to the extent that it is able to reach agreement on certain facts and the theory behind them. Politics is a different register, in which discord is the rule. And so it is scarcely possible to define a 'political community' in this sense, or a journalistic one. The irreducible opposition of interests and perspectives lies at the very root of the plurality that constitutes the political field. For politics is the space of a conflict precisely over the status and interpretation of facts.

Tetryakov dreamed of a 'journalism from below' that would break the corporatism of the 'aesthetic caste' in favour of a 'literary cooperative' and a 'literature of fact', produced by 'factual writers'. Brecht also maintained that nothing could be expected from 'red Tolstoys', since 'we have our own epic: the newspaper'. By claiming to sweep away the old hierarchies of mind and letters, these assertions betray nostalgia for a small-scale production of the written word. They flirt with the illusion, widespread at that time in the socialist movement, of a rapid withering away of art in favour of a proletarian literature. They seek the sources of renovation in the experience of leaflets and works newspapers, worker correspondents, and trade union or party press. They take their stand on the hundred flowers of an 'information from below', designed for readers who are themselves both editors and actors.

In the age of concentration of capital, however, the militant press has steadily lost ground in favour of the business press. *L'Unità* has closed. *L'Humanité* is on life-support. How can one celebrate the virtues of pluralism and hymn the merits of the democratic space, while accepting these disappearances enforced by market competition? The world is not for sale? The world is not a commodity? Culture must have an exceptional status to escape the appetites of the moneychangers in the temple? And the newspaper? What would a democracy without parties be, without means of expression independent of the powers of money?

The tutelary figure of Albert Londres is emblematic of an age of critical journalism, that of the Tintin and Rouletabille comics, the independent and intrepid reporter as twin brother of the adventurer or lone private eye. In the age of organised crime, the Sam Spades

and Marlowes have merged into the bureaucratic machine of the forensic police and the special services of the state. A few islands of old-style journalism still remain. Their survival is as comforting as that of old-style jams and mustards. But multimedia journalism is already a great capitalist enterprise and an ideological apparatus of the market.

The school and the press are constitutive of representative democracy and modern citizenship. Both have contributed to drawing new divisions between the public and private spheres. With the appearance of new communications technologies and the growing stranglehold of the markets over politics, their critical function has withered in favour of an apologetic function or a role of entertainment. The division between private and public has also evolved, following a double movement of privatisation of the public space on one hand, and the display of private life as spectacle on the other. This is why the question of the ethics of journalism has become so impassioned today. Just as inflation of ethical discourse compensates for the enfeebling of politics, and the rhetoric of 'ethical war' ennobles war pure and simple, this professional ethics, no matter how well-intentioned, cannot manage to counter-balance the heavy tendencies of commodified communication.

The press continues to fulfil contradictory functions, similarly to the school, also threatened by commodity logic. At the same time as it contributes to reproducing the social division of labour and relations of domination (between classes and sexes), the school transmits a socialised knowledge and trains the future labour force. It is in the name of this contradiction that we always rejected, in the wake of 1968, the pedagogic utopia of the 'free school,' as well as the leftist blindness that called for the destruction of the school in the name of the struggle against educational regimentation. As a space of conflict, torn between contrary missions, the public school has to be defended. The media institution likewise fulfils a double function, on the one hand of information necessary for the vitality of the public space, and on the other hand of reproducing and diffusing the dominant ideology. That is why the unconditional defence of its diversity, its relative independence, and its freedom from censorship of any kind, is a question of principle.

Beyond such similarities between these institutions and fields, however, there is an essential difference. The school is (still) a public service. The knowledge transmitted and circulating there is not (yet)

chiefly a commodity. The great media apparatuses, on the other hand, are private enterprises producing commodities designed for a market and its consumers. Students and pupils are not (yet) customers of the school or university. If the criteria of competition, audience figures and sales curves were applied to education, then philosophy would have disappeared from the curriculum long ago (it certainly cannot be ruled that its end is nigh). This difference made it possible, even at the height of the liberal reaction of the 1980s, for critical teaching and research to persist at the university, including readings of *Capital*, lectures by Deleuze, seminars from Badiou and Derrida. These studies, giving rise to valid qualifications, would never have survived a commodity logic, except perhaps in the form of a luxury supplied at the caprice of an enlightened philanthropist.

The rift in journalism between its mission of information and the play of opinion is an old story. In the course of our interrupted dialogue, Edwy Plenel remarked to me that the background of David's immortal painting of 'The Tennis Court Oath' presents two kinds of journalist. Standing in the midst of the deputies, Barère is writing his speech, simply titled 'Report of what took place last night at the National Assembly'. Perched in the stands, Marat is writing his *Ami du peuple*. One represents the soberly factual journalism of objective reportage, the other militant and polemical journalism. Barère is at the heart of the action. Marat, looking down, is in the advantageous position of intermediary, between the crowd rumbling outside and the solemn interior of the institution.

Barère at the heart of the melee and Marat at a distance?

Interpretation depends on the way that the scene of the action is perceived: the relationship between the street, which wants to have its say, and the precinct in which power is ensconced. In this case, Barère and Marat no longer symbolise two ideal conceptions of a profession, but rather two types of politics confronting one another.

Once Upon a Time, There'll Be . . .

Today it's the desirability of revolution that's a problem.

— Michel Foucault, 1977

At the start of the twentieth century, the words 'communism', 'internationalism' and 'class struggle' seemed able to light up the future with a shining torch. In her film *Le Camion*, Marguerite Duras lamented how they had fallen into obscurity; repeated disillusion had led them to lose their sparkle along the way. By 1977, Michel Foucault already doubted whether revolution was still 'desirable'. The following year, after the division and electoral defeat of the French Left, this doubt spread among the 68 generation, now in their thirties and forced to make a belated start on professional life, after deferring this as long as possible.

Under the shock of the twilight of Maoism, the internecine strife in Indochina, the social retreat in Europe, the wilting of the Portuguese carnations, the restoration of the monarchy in Spain, the assassination of Aldo Moro in Italy, the election of Karol Wojtyla to the papacy and the Islamic revolution in Iran, something cracked and broke. *Libération* became 'liberalisation'. Orchestrated by the 'new philosophers', the Solzhenitsyn effect symbolised this turning point. For those of us who had read Victor Serge, Anton Ciliga, Trotsky, David Rousset and Kravchenko, *Gulag Archipelago* (and still more, Chalamov's *Kolyma Tales*) was just the confirmation of a disaster, rather than any revelation.

The cessation of the daily *Rouge*, in January 1979, symbolically marked the end of an era and signalled a diaspora of militants. The deadly era of dissociation and repentance began in Italy. And if the victorious Sandinista insurrection of July 1979 managed to rekindle the embers and warm up cooled enthusiasm for a while, this return of the flame did not weigh much in the balance as against the

neoliberal counter-reform under way in Britain and the United States.

In France, after twenty years of uninterrupted rule by the right, the Mitterrand presidency opened up new career paths for those of our generation who sought social advance. Delighted to be able at last to be on the right side, after being on the wrong side for so long, several people disillusioned with Maoism recycled themselves into militant anti-communists, under the new cover of defence of human rights and the democratic crusade against totalitarian dangers. Others succumbed to the tempered delights of 'weak thought'. After growing up under the social compromise of the postwar boom, we suddenly found ourselves immersed in the icy wave of neoliberal reaction.

In his *Confession of a Child of the Century*, Musset evoked the vague and floating spirit that marked the Restoration, between a past that had disappeared and an undecipherable future. That was also a disenchanting generation, 'wrapped up in the mantle of egoism'. For want of great promises and great hopes, Musset wrote, this time, a 'frightful sea of action with no goal', was a time of petty pleasures and modest virtues. Heine likewise, arriving in Paris in 1832, railed against the 'one-time apostles who dreamed of a golden age for all humanity, and are now content with propagating the age of silver': 'Commercialism is triumphant, egoism prevails, and the best of men have to wear mourning. This is counter-revolution. There now reigns the terror of the happy medium.'

Faced with neoliberal reaction and the terror of the happy medium à la Mitterrand, would we also capsize on this murky sea with no clear horizon? After having dreamed of epics and heroic adventures, would we succumb to the trap of mirages and appearances, and be reduced to postmodern minimalism and miniature?

Louis Althusser's posthumous writings describe the 1970s as the decade when a 'world of thought' was shattered. There is undoubtedly a painful connection between this collapse and the domestic tragedy of 16 November 1980, when the master strangled his lifetime companion. Our own world of thought was backed by a different view of history, fuelled by a different heritage, and did not collapse. But it was subjected to a severe test. The crisis was threefold: a theoretical crisis of Marxism, a strategic crisis of the revolutionary project, and a social crisis of the subject of universal emancipation. In a worrying intellectual and moral debacle, farewells proliferated – farewells to arms, to Marxism, to revolution, to the proletariat. Once they

stepped off the gleaming locomotives of history, the passengers saw hope disappear into the distance, accompanied by a chorus of suppressed snuffles.

My heart was sad, on this sorry station platform . . .*

Cue for handkerchiefs!

The suddenness of the parting of the ways was particularly visible with Foucault. When he returned from a visit to Japan in 1978, Foucault declared that Marxism had been struck by an unquestionable crisis, itself located within a broader crisis of Western thought and the modern concept of revolution. In flagrant contradiction with his concern to think the multiple and to pluralise historical, social and ideological phenomena, he claimed to put Marxism (in the singular!) on trial. He condemned it wholesale and indiscriminately, without making clear that what he was talking about was specifically an orthodox Marxism of party and state. He was thus able proudly to ignore the tumultuous wave with its warm and cold currents. Criticising a supposedly Marxist tradition for having too often confused historical prognosis (backed by mechanical necessity) with strategic or performative prophecy, he applied the hot iron to the most bloody part of the wound.

Whilst he acknowledged the merit of the Trotskyists for their 'considerable work' on the question of bureaucracy and the Soviet Union,¹ Foucault proposed to reverse the usual question and investigate Marxism on the basis of the gulag, rather than investigating the gulag on the basis of Marx and Lenin. Without treating Marx as a dead dog, he sought to relieve him of 'the party dogmatism that has branded and confined him for so long'. This research programme, in quest of a Marx without the 'ism',² has indeed led to some valuable results in a whole range of different fields.

In parallel with Foucault's investigations, Lucio Colletti published his *Déclin du marxisme* in 1980.³ He noted 'the failure of the Althusserian rescue operation'. Maoism, according to him, had been simply the final attempt to conceive the change in the revolutionary subject, at a time when belief in the great proletarian epic was already tarnished and the false Chinese and Soviet idols were crumbling into

* The line 'Mon cœur qu'il était triste, ce triste quai de gare', is from the song 'Vingt ans après' (1962) by Lény Escudero.

dust. In the 1960s and 70s, the apparent cultural hegemony of Marxism had only been, in reality, a *trompe-l'oeil* and prelude to its final crisis. Renouncing the promises of an earthly theodicy, Colletti preached a return to Kant and Kelsen, the confusion between facts and values, ends and means, being the original (and mortal) sin of Marxism.

The crisis of Marxism meant a crisis of revolutionary practice and strategy. Foucault's writings of this period are deeply pervaded by the eclipse of expectation. This is the first time for a hundred and twenty years, he sadly observed as early as 1977, that there was no longer on earth 'a single point from which the light of hope can shine forth'. There was 'no longer an orientation', 'not a single socialist country' of which one could say: 'This is what we have to do.' Foucault drew the conclusion that 'we are sent back to 1830, in other words we have to start all over from scratch'. Start all over? Certainly. But not from zero. Not from nothing, from a blank page or a clean slate.

One always begins in the middle . . .

The age of extremes has come to an end. It can be neither wiped nor bracketed out. It is impossible to start again from 1830, from 1875 or from 1917, without explaining oneself and settling accounts. It is 'the age of revolutions' itself that has become problematic, not simply one or other of its avatars. For two centuries, Foucault went on to say, the hope of revolution 'has overshadowed history, organized our perception of time, polarized hopes; it constituted a gigantic effort to acclimatize revolt within a rational and masterable history.' The French Revolution inaugurated a new paradigm of political action performed by new actors, it introduced new legitimacies and new representations and raised new strategic questions. If June 1848 and the Commune of 1871 drew new lines of confrontation between classes, these remained none the less inscribed in the same historical paradigm, just like the October revolution, the failed German revolution or the Spanish civil war.

As defeats and disillusion progressed, the question once raised by Horkheimer became acute: 'But is this revolution really such a desirable thing?'²⁴ In the light of the Iranian revolution, this acquired a new meaning for Foucault. What is a revolution that immediately proclaims its specifically Islamic character? What was happening to the relationship between revolution and religion in the late twentieth

century? It was tempting – a temptation we did not completely escape ourselves – to interpret the Iranian events of 1979 and the overthrow of the shah as the repetition of a previous scenario, with the imams in the role of Father Gapon in 1905. The first, religious act of the play would then be only a prelude to the decisive act of class struggle and its happy dénouement.

‘Is that so certain?’ Foucault asked. It did indeed turn out to be something very different from a mere repetition. A sign, perhaps, that the ‘semantics of historical time’ inaugurated by the French revolution was itself unravelling.⁵

The narrowing of horizons of expectation led on to a disturbing postmodernism: the rejection of ‘grand narratives’, a resignation to the fragmentation of meaning, a loss of historical perspective, the shrinking of temporality to an immediate present, the pleasure of the ephemeral and zapping, the aestheticising of rebellion.⁶ This post-modern rhetoric drew its arguments from communications technology, from the fluidity of networks, the development of ‘immaterial’ goods and the dissolution of the modes of socialisation characteristic of modernity. Its novelty, however, was not as absolute as it claimed. As far back as the crisis of 1929, Paul Valéry declared ‘the age of the provisional’. The ‘superstition of tomorrow’ (and concern for it) was abolished, and we were condemned to become ‘momentary’: ‘Everything appears to us so precarious and unstable in all respects, so necessarily accidental, that we have come to make the least sustained accidents of sensation and consciousness into the substance of very many works.’

In this climate of renunciation, denial and repentance, revolution tended to be reduced to a matter of desire. Lyotard’s ‘desiring machines’, or the ‘desire for revolution’ celebrated by Jean-Paul Dollé,⁷ appeared from the early 1970s onwards as the foundation of the ‘linguistic’ or cultural turn in the humanities⁸ and a retreat to pure desiring subjectivity. Vaguely post-68, and falsely juvenile, this emotional desire for revolution gave off the bitter perfume of faded flowers scattered on a tomb. Mere desire is all that is left when the initial élan and fervour are exhausted: a wishfulness without will, a greed without appetite, an erotic caprice or a phantom of freedom – a subjectivity enslaved to an impractical sense of the possible.

This desire, which people obstinately believe free from necessity, is in fact no more than the other side of their consumerism. The desiring machine is first and foremost a consuming machine, the inverted

reflection of the goods in the shop-window, which solicits the subjugated customer with a seductive wink.

The substitution of desire for need is an old story. Back in 1874, in Léon Walras's *Elements of Pure Economics*, it corresponded to the neoclassical replacement of labour-value with 'desire-value'. According to the marginalist subjectification of value, the economic object actually arises from desire. To measure value, Charles Gide (André's uncle) proposed to eliminate the term 'utility', too objective in his eyes, in favour of 'desirability'.

At the end of the 1970s, this dissolution of needs in the acid of desire was the latest thing. Baudrillard had already proclaimed in 1973, in his 'critique of the political economy of the sign', that 'a theory of needs makes no sense'. He categorically rejected the possibility of any such theory, which he saw as an 'ideological concept'. And in 1980, Georges-Hubert de Radkowski's little book *Les Jeux du désir*⁹ developed a sophisticated version of the collapse of need into desire. He proposed 'listening to the abyss-like power of desire' and the way in which 'it works us'. Classical economics, based on the concept of need, had led in the wrong direction. Beneath its transparent simplicity, this concept conveyed a 'radical ambiguity'. The satisfaction of needs, in fact, was not oriented to any finality, and could in no case constitute a rationale. Need was simply a 'hallucinatory spectre', 'perfectly useless' and incapable of explaining anything.

Need, so Radkowski went on, was totally invested in the reproduction of the same, operating at the level of the vital minimum and thus 'conformist, conservative and counter-revolutionary', completely on the side of history as experienced, and against history as acted. It was thus incapable of supplying a principle of transformation or subversion, only a principle of submission and adaptation to the surrounding milieu. The man of needs was essentially *homo economicus*, an 'empty shell', the barren footprint left by a lost subjectivity. The rediscovered subject, on the other hand, displayed itself by a 'false note', responding to the call of lack and its fertile dissatisfaction: 'It is only from the subject that desire arises, releasing the screws of necessity.'

There was thus an allegedly close association between desire and revolution. In need, everything was rejection of alterity and repetition of the same: 'the happy innocence of need, impersonal, impassive, disinterested, objective'. Desire, on the contrary, lay on the side of fault, sin, transgression. Transforming a subjected existence into

an autonomous one, it was essentially revolutionary, to the precise extent that it de-fatalised the necessity of the milieu and acted as a force of dis-adaptation. It 'changes life by a change of life'.

This liberating desire, however, was condemned to 'advance concealed'. Human society does indeed operate solely with desire, but only after having 'disguised it as need', naturalised and domesticated it, captured it in the net of economic discipline.

Beyond this polemic against the economics of needs, Radkowski went on to oppose to social critique an ontology or theology of desire. Sometimes explicitly and always implicitly, his target was Marx.

Agnes Heller was one of the rare philosophers to have tried to base an explicit theory of needs on Marx. While this plays 'a hidden role of first importance' in the Marxian critique of political economy, the concept actually remains poorly defined.¹⁰ It is clear, however, that the categories of need that proliferate in Marx's text are no longer those of classic political economy, which confuses social need with effective demand. Contrary to the claim made by Radkowski, this historicised need is not the mark of a subjugation resigned to the natural necessity of simple reproduction. If 'the genesis of the species is nothing other than the genesis of needs', the latter are differentiated, by way of transformations and metamorphoses, into natural needs, physical and necessary, and socially produced dynamic needs. These fluid needs are then no longer the objective and petrified desire denounced by Radkowski. Despite the prejudices of methodological individualism, they become, on the contrary, the concrete expression of socialised desire.

Determined in this way, need is not a 'sorry passion', impotent to fill an irreducible lack, but rather the joyous passion of a permanent revolution. It labours the field of the possible in order to lovingly combine the event and duration, political uncertainties with historic determinations. It emphasises, without succumbing to it, the limits of economic categories, which it overspills on all sides. The specific notion of 'natural need' is then satisfied with recalling the basic conditions of reproduction of the species, and the ecological imperative of conceiving thresholds and limits.

The profane revolution, a 'non-fatal share of becoming', does not arise from a compulsive dynamic of desires, but rather from a subversive dynamic of needs. It responds to the reasoned imperative of changing the world – revolutionising it – before it collapses in the fracas of broken idols.

From the French Revolution onwards, the idea of revolution was associated with the ideas of acceleration, perfection and progress. It became the proper name of the old dreams of a better future. Promoted to the 'locomotive of history', it tore towards the future with all its metallic power, until its mechanical rush ended in the rumble of cattle trucks.

Despite its claimed modernity, this profane revolution still swathed the event with a miraculous aura. A patient work of secularisation – always defeated, and constantly recommenced – was needed in order to pass from sacred transcendence (with its train of temptations and sins) to the trivial immanence of social needs. By way of experiments and tests, the political project finally carried the day over the myth. The revolution descended from heaven to earth.

Everything happens today as if this movement of secularisation has exhausted itself and is threatening to go into reverse. The revolutionary idea then loses its explosive substance in favour of an aesthetic or ethical stance, or else an act of faith, even a subjective judgement of taste. It is torn between a categorical imperative of resistance and the expectation of an improbable redemptive miracle, between a purifying return to sources and a twilight desire for conservative revolution. It is not the least of paradoxes, in fact, to see conservative neoliberals now claiming the banner of dynamism and movement, in the face of a left paralysed and immobile, with its reformism without reforms. If 'the best of commodity worlds' had to follow this course, the thieves of hope would have succeeded in the perfect historical hold-up.

Not only the heist of the century, but of all history.

In the 1980s, confronted with this counter-reform, revolutionary hope withdrew to a line of stoic resistance. The obstinacy not to give in, not to submit to the force of the *fait accompli*, to continue despite everything, was sometimes paid for by a fetishism of the event, expected as the *deus ex machina* of a history lacking any compass. Those who, like Alain Badiou, Jacques Rancière or Michel Surya, refused to fall in with the prevailing stream, to bend under the gusts of the prevailing winds, did not always escape this.

And yet it is less the necessity of changing the world that is in question now than the way to achieve this. The crisis of Marxism and the muddying of the revolutionary idea then led, 'in the last instance', to the vacuum left by the disappearance of the great mythical subject, to which André Gorz said his farewell in the same year that Colletti proclaimed the decline of Marxism.¹¹ Many others have stumbled

since then. And yet 1980 was also the year of the Gdansk workers' uprising and the engineering workers' strike in São Paulo, which sounded the death knell of the military dictatorship.

Faced with the crumbling of the proletarian rock, Gilles Deleuze advised learning to read, beneath the reproduction of classes and the binary simplification of their struggle, 'the variable map of the masses'. Rather than farewell to the proletariat, according to him it was a question of a philosophical deconstruction of the great classical subject of emancipation and the unifying power of sovereign reason. Foucault also recalled that bourgeois power was able to develop grand strategies 'without having to presuppose a subject for them'. Paraphrasing Althusser, he put forward the hypothesis of a 'strategy without a subject'.¹² The sociological weakening of the exploited class, however, did not lead him to abandon the concept. On the contrary, he strongly emphasised its political and performative import.¹³

The class struggle, in other words, conceived as strategic concept.

With the evident decline of the 'workers' citadels' (the Lorraine steelworks, the naval shipyards, the mines, the de-industrialisation of Bilbao or Liverpool), descriptive categories sprang up once again, resuscitating the image of the precapitalist workforce. The agrarian populism revived by Solzhenitsyn certainly contributed to this, as did mass unemployment and the experience of new exclusions and new precariousness. Foucault, however, remained reticent about using the notion of the plebs. He saw very well here the danger of making it the permanent foundation or first substance of an eternal history, the never extinguished hearth of all revolts.¹⁴

The neoliberal counter-reform of the 1980s strengthened the long-term tendency towards an increased division of labour, a growing social complexity, and an individualistic individualisation. The consciousness of multiple allegiances, complementary or contradictory, and recognition of the 'plural individual', found new instruments of analysis in Bourdieu's problematic of social fields. Social classes, however, do not dissolve into the postmodern potage. They are transformed and metamorphosed, as they have always been, from the Silesian weavers of 1844 and the tailors, cabinet-makers, jewellers and shoemakers of Paris in 1848, to the working-class fortresses of Billancourt or Mirafiori, by way of the miner in *Germinal* or the railwayman in *La Bête humaine*.

The 'working-class condition' had not disappeared, according to the sociologists Stéphane Beaud and Michel Pialoux in 1999,

following a ten-year study of the industrial basin of Montbéliard.* It had simply become invisible. Or, more exactly, it had been made invisible. The media and the social science establishment have contributed to this, withdrawing their interest from these tribes in the process of disappearing, memorials of a past era. The same people who used to poetically exalt the 'red proletariat' were not the last to pronounce its funeral oration. It took the strikes of winter 1995, and the electoral thunderclap of 21 April 2002, for the autistic bandwagon to take a new interest in these hidden (and despised) worlds.

Beyond the effects of fashion, however, a legitimate question is expressed, both about the agents and actors of social transformation, and about their ability to subvert the established order despite the invading bewitchment of commodity fetishism, as well as the actual conditions of tactical alliances and strategic convergences.

In an interview published in *Le Nouvel Observateur* in 1992, Marguerite Duras maintained that in her eyes the class struggle was 'the value of the left', which should be urgently re-established. This profession of faith left the interviewer gaping. And yet it was not lacking in political sense. In 1983, the turn to austerity had in fact prepared for the eruption onto the political stage of the disturbing figure of Le Pen. The hasty farewells to the proletariat, the denigration of the losers (at a time when the winners, like Bernard Tapie,[†] were on the rise) could only favour the revival of rank populism.

Denouncing the logic of a 'terrifying negative solidarity', Hannah Arendt saw very well how the Nazi lie of the *völkisch* community responded to 'the collapse of European class society'. The transformation of classes into masses was, in her eyes, the necessary precondition for total domination, since totalitarian movements were 'mass organizations of atomized and isolated individuals'. This atomisation was expressed both on the social level (by repression, individualisation, flexibility, generalised competition) and that of discourse (by a

* *Retour sur la condition ouvrière: Enquête aux usines Peugeot de Sochaux-Montbéliard* (Paris: Éditions Fayard, 1999).

† Bernard Tapie, born 1943, built his fortune selling companies he bought at knock-down prices. Minister of towns under Mitterrand. President of Olympique Marseille football club 1986–94, falling into disgrace on account of its involvement in match-fixing. Jailed for corruption, also the subject of a long-running prosecution for tax fraud. An MP for the liberal Parti Radical de Gauche, more recently a supporter of Sarkozy. Also had stints as an actor, singer and racing driver. Author of a book that summed up the Thermidorian spirit of the 1980s: *Gagner* (Paris: Laffont, 1986).

work on vocabulary). Walter Benjamin was equally sensitive to the fact that Nazi Germany became the country in which it was forbidden to call the proletariat by its name.

The 'farewells to the proletariat' are thus not just the expression of a risky sociological diagnosis. They also contribute to a political and moral debacle. On the ruins of class solidarity, what flourish are identitarian panics, the herd instinct, myths of origins, sects and tribes.

On the threshold of the 1980s, it was clear that the final struggle would not be for tomorrow, nor even the day after. Faced with the triple crisis of emancipatory politics (theoretical, social and strategic), while the floodlights of 1968 had dimmed and the sputtering of weapons faded into the distance, the time had come to (re-)read Marx. Not in the piety of an eternal return to the founding texts, but rather as a necessary detour towards our own present, via byways on which one might meet forgotten companions, discover hidden elective affinities and disconcerting astral attractions.

'Crisis of Marxism?' In the words of Stathis Kouvelakis, 'Marxism is itself a thinking of crisis', by its very nature.¹⁵ From the 'decomposition of Marxism' diagnosed by Sorel, to its 'decline' according to Colletti, its history has throughout been one of crisis. This crisis began as soon as the name of Marx was burdened with its doctrinaire suffix. As revealed by the great strategic controversies that stirred the workers' movement on the eve of the Great War, this recurrent crisis did not presage a simple disappearance, but rather a branching, a rhizomatic extension, a pluralising. In response to the challenges of the era, opposing tendencies have not stopped disputing the legacy ever since.

The crisis of the 1980s presents many common features with earlier ones. Once again, the Marxian research programme was subjected to questions and doubts born from a period of expansion and transformation of capitalism. Once again, the forms and practices of social movements were put to the test of the metamorphoses of labour and its organisation. The singular depth of the present crisis lies rather in the collapse of those state societies and orthodoxies that were presented, for more than half a century, as the embodiment of the communist spectre on earth.

The long theoretical dearth of the Stalin period sharpened appetites. The lead weight of an official Marxism and the experience of inquisitorial excommunications fed the taste for a free thought whose 'great heretics' were often – too often – lone forerunners.¹⁵ Kouvelakis

stresses the opposite risk, that the sprouting of 'a thousand Marxisms' today might lead to a fragmentation or polite coexistence of schools and chapels, in a pacified consensual landscape from which the fruitful need to create the new and different has disappeared. Jacques Derrida, publishing *Spectres of Marx* in 1993, was already disturbed by the tendency to play off a wiser academic Marx against a revolutionary Marx, and to neutralise by exegesis his subversive call to political action.

On the borderline between the red years and the grey years, the time had come in 1980 to take a certain distance, both geographical and theoretical, in order to listen to these thousand (and one) Marxisms, told through the night by a Scheherazade both patient and indomitable. Without in any way distancing oneself from immediate action, it was necessary to rummage afresh in the reasons behind passion, the better to relight the flame; to trace new divisions between the essential and the contingent, history and chance. Without any pre-established plan this work of reconstruction would take three paths, sometimes parallel and sometimes crossing, so that it was impossible to say in advance whether they would end up joining together: that of an inventory of the legacy and its plurality; that of the Marrano trail and messianic reason; and finally, that of a Marx freed from the doctrinal fetters that have held him captive for too long.

E agora, Zé?

In 1979, the world continued to turn, but it no longer had room for Billy.

– Dennis Lehane, *Un dernier verre avant la guerre*

My friends have left for the islands
 In the islands, men lose themselves
 And yet some have escaped and brought back the news
 That the world, the great world, is growing each day
 Between love and fire
 Between life and fire
 My heart grows ten metres and explodes
 Oh future life! We shall invent you.*

– Carlos Drummond, ‘José’

No return without (long) delays. As Ulysses slowly learned.

In 1980, Europe entered a deadly decade. The exceptional conditions that had made possible the ‘thirty glorious years’ of economic growth were at an end. The economic basis of the post-war social pacts (Keynesian, populist or bureaucratic) was collapsing. In the United States and Britain, the workers’ movement experienced its first major social defeats. The advent of Margaret Thatcher closed the turbulent chapter opened in 1968. The hour of the neoliberal counter-offensive sounded.

And now, José?
 The festival is over
 The lights are switched off

* ‘Meus amigos foram as ilhas / Ilhas perdem o homem / Entretanto alguns / se salvaram et trouxeram a notícia / De que o mundo, o grande mundo / esta crescendo todos os dias, / Entre o fogo e o amor. / Então, meu / coração também pode crescer / Entre o amor e o fogo / Entre a vida e o fogo, / Meu coração cresce dez metros é explode.’

The people have disappeared
 The night has turned cold
 And now, José?*

Carried by the winds to distant shores, for which travellers and captains once set out 'drunk on a heroic and brutal dream', hope once more took the paths of discovery or exile. In Europe, the cycle of expectations opened by 1968 was over. In Central America, on the other hand, the dice seemed still in play, the impetus of the Cuban revolution not yet quite exhausted. The Sandinista insurrection that triumphed in 1979 opened the narrow gate of possibilities.

Latin America, in fact, was experiencing particular historical and social conditions. In contrast to the Arab world, it had a long tradition of peasant resistance, workers' struggles, uprisings and insurrections, their origin lying in the national liberation epics of the nineteenth century. The threatening proximity of the 'northern colossus' fuelled an anti-imperialist consciousness that left scarcely any room for the illusions that could exist in Eastern Europe as to the liberating role of Uncle Sam. Despite an increasingly senile bureaucratic regime, the Cuban resistance to the Yankee blockade symbolised the continuity of the Bolivarian epic. Finally, Brazilian industrialisation, the resistance of rebellious peasantries to the effects of capitalist globalisation and the demands of indigenous peoples, all fuelled powerful social movements.

There was nothing imaginary about the shock wave of the 1980s. The extension of the Nicaraguan revolution to Guatemala and El Salvador seemed imminent on several occasions. Popular uprisings took place in Bolivia and the Dominican Republic. Between 1980 and 1985, military dictatorships in Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina fell like ninepins. The combination in Brazil of major workers' strikes and agrarian revolts sketched out a new balance of social forces.

This enthusiasm was broken. After a ten-year war in Central America, the double electoral defeat of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and Lula in Brazil closed this promising cycle in 1989. The 'low-intensity' war waged by the Nicaraguan Contras, with financial and military support from the United States, had forced this small country to

* 'E agora, José? / A festa acabou, / A luz apagou, / O povo sumiu, / A noite esfriou, / E agora, José?' Carlos Drummond de Andrade, 'José', *Antologia poética* (Rio-São Paulo: Editora Record, 2002).

devote over half of its budget to defence. The revolutionary movements in El Salvador and Guatemala had to confront not only moth-eaten military dictatorships, but also sophisticated military advisers trained by Israel and Taiwan. Following the doctrine expounded by their ambassadors to the UN, Jeanne Kirkpatrick and John Negroponte, the Pentagon strategists now sought to avoid a new cycle of military coups by supporting 'authoritarian democracies'.

On the planetary scale, the implosion of the self-proclaimed 'socialist camp' turned geopolitical relations upside down, eliminating the great imaginary rear base that a good number of Latin American revolutionaries had believed they could rely on, despite everything. In Brazil, the Workers' Party had developed relations not just with Cuba, which was logical enough, but also with East Germany, where its cadres regularly attended training courses.¹

At the turn of the decade, the development of international coordinates began to demoralise sections of the left and turn them towards social democracy, including components of the Farabundo Martí front in El Salvador. The deterioration in the balance of forces in favour of the imperial hyperpower was translated by a process of continental recolonisation, subsequently expressed in NAFTA, the Puebla-Panama plan, the redeployment of US military power in the context of Plan Colombia, and more generally in the projected great American free-trade zone, ALCA. The shock of neoliberal globalisation would also precipitate a crisis of the local bourgeoisies and national elites, which in the preceding decades had rallied to 'developmentalist' perspectives.²

The Zapatista uprising of 1 January 1994, the very day that NAFTA came into force, gave the signal for a new cycle of struggles, marked by the emergence of new populist figures (Chavez in Venezuela, Evo Morales in Bolivia, Gutierrez in Ecuador), by the Argentinian popular uprising of 2001–02, the financial and moral bankruptcy of that country (after being a model pupil for the doctors of the IMF), and the hope born from the victory of Lula in the Brazilian presidential election of 2002.

Seen from Europe in 1979, the future looked rather downcast, despite the Polish workers' uprising. Our experience with *Rouge quotidien* was hardly over, the financial debacle more or less coped with, the left occupied in licking the wounds of its divisions, when the crisis began to strike certain industrial sectors hard (such as steel, textiles and shipbuilding). It was at this time that the Ligue leadership

sent me to the leadership of the International, with the priority task of following the emerging Brazilian experiment.

In January 1980, my first trip with this new function was to New York. The famous questionnaire on political morality required for obtaining a visa was still in force. Though I knew very well that you had to lie and answer 'no' to the question of past membership of a Communist organisation, I answered 'yes' out of defiance. The consul was embarrassed and received me in his office. Jimmy Carter's presidential term was not yet over, and lyrical flights on human rights were much in vogue. And so I waxed ironic on the anachronism of this crime of opinion. Courteous, but much embarrassed, my questioner ended up asking me fair and square whether I was a member of the Communist Party. I replied that I had been expelled a long time ago, and could rather be viewed as a Trotskyist. He seemed relieved, claiming that the adjective 'Communist' meant a connection with hostile foreign powers (Soviet Union, China or Cuba), whereas Trotskyism was a political opinion. He granted me a two-week visa on the pretext of a 'business' trip to firm up publishing deals!

New York at that time was under the shock of the hostage-taking at the US embassy in Teheran. The press and television were out of control. I discovered a media brutality very different from the hypocritical politeness of France or Britain. Besides, the Soviet Union had just invaded Afghanistan. With an almost sacrificial determination, our American comrades diametrically opposed the official discourse. Subject to an ideological steamroller, they tended to adopt the tricky formula that the enemies of our enemies are necessarily our friends. And so they boldly sported T-shirts to the glory of the Iranian revolution, printed with the provocative beard of Ayatollah Khomeini. A courageous posture, no doubt, but politically questionable: in Iran, our comrades who had returned from exile were already imprisoned and threatened with the death penalty.

The over-subtle criticisms from us Europeans about Soviet intervention in Afghanistan struck them as the mentality of petty-bourgeois 'bullshitters' flinching from the harsh reality of the world. Following the fearsome binary logic of the excluded middle, they said that you had to 'choose your camp'. The unambiguous determination of the ruling class and its arrogant simplifications thus tends, by a perverse mirror effect, to find its reflection in the rhetoric of the oppressed.

If we denounced the intentions of imperialism in the Gulf (without foreseeing, of course, the consequences it would have twenty years

later), we refused to see Soviet policy, arising from regional geostrategic interests, as having the least progressive aspect. But this subtlety did not prevent us from getting caught up in an Afghan carpet of contradictions. We denounced the Soviet intervention as reactionary, but immediately added that the conflict would move to a different plane if the great powers confronted one another via the intermediaries of tribal conflict. Then it would not just be an Afghan civil war. Resistance to bureaucratic occupation would be overshadowed by the confrontation of Cold War adversaries. Invoking the ill-chosen texts of Trotsky on Stalin's invasion of Finland, we refused to adopt the slogan of immediate withdrawal of Soviet forces that a minority of the International championed.³

A meeting organised by the Ligue at the Mutualité left me with the bitterest memory of all my rhetorical performances. A public meeting is a kind of dialogue between the speaker and the hall. Far from addressing a silent mass, the speaker distinguishes faces, interprets mimicry or silence, meets glances in which approval or perplexity can be read. As I got into the byways of our argument, I felt a veil of incomprehension fall over the assembly. Recalcitrant question marks seemed to light up and blink over their heads. For the first time since 1968, there was no connection.

This was a confirming sign that the wind had turned. We were no longer borne forward by the breeze of the age. For the first time, our spoiled generation, fed on the progressive myths of the postwar period and promised a flight from one success to the next, had to learn to rub against the grain of history. This, and not the reverse, is the general condition of revolutionary struggle.

The night has turned cold
 Day has not broken
 The tram has not come
 Laughter has not come
 Utopia has not come
 And everything is over
 And everything has fled
 And everything is rotten
 And now, José?*

* 'A noite esfriou, / O dia não veio, / O bonde não veio, / O riso não veio / Não veio a utopia / E tudo acabou / E tudo fugiu / E tudo mofou, / E agora, José?' Drummond, 'José'.

In March 1980 I landed at the Rio airport. The country was still under the yoke of the senile military dictatorship of General Figueiredo, a man who showed the same tenderness to his horses as had emperor Caligula. The workers' strikes of the previous year, the efforts at independence of trade unions subordinated to the state by a labour legislation inspired by that of Mussolini, the growing popularity of a charismatic engineering worker from the São Paulo suburbs, tolled the bell for the regime. Democratic spaces were opening up. A militant press was reborn. It was a time of light and shadow, between semi-legality and semi-clandestinity.

Ernest Mandel enthusiastically saw Brazil as the land of all renaissance and hope. The 'economic miracle' of the 1970s had generated a massive and concentrated industrial proletariat. The 'ABC' industrial triangle (São André, São Bernardo and São Caetano) alone counted more workers than the legendary Ruhr. This was far from the 27,000 industrial wage-earners in the whole of tiny Nicaragua. The Brazilian social giant was beginning to stir. On the wave of the strike movements of 1978 and 1979, trade-union leaders who were termed 'authentic', in opposition to the '*pelegos*' of official unionism,⁴ envisaged the creation of a workers' party.

Brazil had never known a mass workers' party. The Communist Party had arisen rather from the revolutionary nationalism of the 1930s (illustrated by the legendary long march of the Prestes column). Seeking an end to dependence, young officers of that time found a possible model in the autocratic and bureaucratic Soviet development. Under the populist regimes of the 1950s and 60s, political life remained dominated by regional caciques and their clientelist practices. In the absence of modern political parties, the army and the church remained the two great institutions with a national dimension.

Formed in underground resistance to the dictatorship, a new radical left emerged from the catacombs, politically fragmented and geographically scattered. It constituted a mosaic of small organisations, for the most part tending to Maoism or Trotskyism. The relaunch of democratic mobilisations, the rise in union struggles, the renaissance of the student movement and the chronic agrarian crisis, all contributed to bringing these groups together in search of a global response to the country's crisis.

Armed with an unshakeable sociological rationalism, Ernest saw Brazil as a kind of tropical equivalent to Bismarckian Germany, the

cradle of the modern European workers' movement. He was convinced that we could rapidly develop there a revolutionary organisation of several thousand militants. As I had formed solid friendships with the Brazilian comrades exiled in France and Argentina, and could stumble along in Portuguese, everything pointed to me for this adventure.

And so I disembarked at Rio with a large sailor's sack over my shoulder.

In this city of Rio
With two million people
I am alone in my room
I am alone in America [...]
Two million people!
I never asked for so many . . .
I just needed a friend . . .

By 1980, the old Carioca capital counted eight million people, not just two. And when I got off the plane, I would find not just one friend but two, João Machado and Joaquim Soriano.[†] A young 'critic of political economy' (rather than an economist, he insisted), a fan of Hegel and Milton Nascimento, João, a laconic *mineiro*⁵ with the beard of a Portuguese conquistador, was a convinced and convincing advocate of the young and yet unnamed organisation's adherence to the Fourth International. Joaquim, for his part, clever, voluble, and bearded à la Lula, was a lively *nordestino* studying agronomy in Rio. We had met for breakfast in a Copacabana studio lent by a sympathiser. There was nothing melancholy about our embryonic conspiracy. I learned that we had only three comrades in Rio, one of whom had been a full-timer for the Ligue during his exile in France. This abysmally unfavourable balance of forces did not discourage Joaquim.

* 'Nesta cidade do Rio, / De dois milhões de habitantes, / Estou sozinho no quarto / Estou sozinho na America [...] / De dos milhões de habitantes! / E nem precisava tanto . . . / Precisava de um amigo . . .' Drummond, 'José'.

† João Machado (born 1951). Co-founder of the Brazilian Workers' Party (PT). Leading member of the Party for Socialism and Freedom (PSOL) from 2003 onwards. Member of the International Committee of the FI. Professor of Economics at the Catholic University of São Paulo.

Joaquim Soriano, leading member of Democracia Socialista (tendency within the PT), member of the Executive Bureau of the FI, National Secretary for Education in the PT. Agronomist.

Without raising an eyebrow, he listed the herculean tasks in store for us: building a workers' party, a single trade-union federation, and the Brazilian section of the Fourth International. Besides these historic challenges, Balzac's *Ah was dema, Florio!* paled by comparison.

It was a question of scale, space and volume. This was Brazil. More than a country, a continent.

Two years before, our comrades had founded the paper *Um Tempo* along with allies who included Emir Sader and Marco Aurelio Garcia.² They had their modest premises in São Paulo's student quarter of Pinheiros. The kernel of the group hailed from Minas Gerais, which had a reputation in Brazil for politics and politicians. The *mineiro*, like the *marmite* in France, is supposedly 'neither for nor against, quite the contrary'. From their mining region, our comrades had kept an economy with words, their speech punctuated with cautious 'perhaps' and popular adages in praise of slowness: 'Careful with the procession, saints are made of clay . . .'

The possibilities were certainly immense, though their precautions and delays in taking decisions often exasperated me. My new comrades, however, were wise. Coming from different backgrounds, with diverse experience and regional culture, they avoided prematurely closing their discussions with a vote before seeking as long as was needed a broad and patient consensus. This practice of African democracy, in preference to the majority of parliamentary cultures, made up for cohesion in their case what it lost in time.

Parachuted into the São Paulo metropolis, this little team of discrete and stubborn *mineiros* were poles away from the carnivalesque exuberance that popular imagery has of Brazil. Accustomed as I was to meetings in which the turn to speak is bitterly disputed, I long found their meditative councils disconcerting. They could remain silent for minutes at a time, while they cautiously smoothed their post-colonial goatees and seemed to seek inspiration in the hieroglyphic cracks in the ceiling. I sometimes feared that their silence simply expressed a reticence to speak in the presence of a foreigner, but this was quite unfounded. It was simply a rhythm of thinking and reflection that they preferred to hasty chatter.

The group took the name of Democracia Socialista, referring to the programmatic document of the same name that had been adopted by the VIII World Congress of the Fourth International in 1979. It was implanted chiefly in Belo Horizonte and Porto Alegre. The contrast between the two cities was striking. The 'gauchos' of Belo

Horizonte swallowed impressive *churrascos*, and preferred wine to *guarana*. Raul Pont was the young veteran and unchallenged paterfamilias of the group.⁶ The descendant of Catalan immigrants, his tall and debonair profile often broke out in an innocent smile. It was easy to imagine him, with a steaming maté in his hand, walking across vast stretches where flocks were pasturing. He was the embodiment of generous goodness and rectitude. A militant from the 1960s in a small group sympathising with the International,⁷ he did not go into exile under the dictatorship. Lula, who in case of disagreement was inclined to play the workerist demagogue, often attacked him at the early meetings of the PT – the worker versus the intellectual. But without success: Raul had been in prison at a time when Lula was still a figure in the official trade unions, radicalised only later, as the leaders of the engineering workers' opposition in São Paulo never failed to remind him.⁸ The future president of the republic could never wield the slightest moral ascendancy over Raul.

In Porto Alegre, the welcome was more than warm. I discovered an unexpected notoriety in our militant circle. My article on Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg in *Partisans*, translated into Portuguese, had become a classic of gaúcho bolshevist education.⁹ Raul and his partner Éliane took me round the port and the old covered market (not yet refurbished). I acquired here the indispensable equipment for maté, *calabasse* and *cimarrao*. Raul spoke affectionately of this city as his home. He was far from imagining that one day he would be its deputy mayor: how could one conceive, just emerging from the catacombs of clandestinity, that the experience of the participatory budget would become a global reference point, and Porto Alegre the symbolic capital of resistance to commodity globalisation?

In autumn 1980 (spring in terms of the climate), the great strike of engineering workers in the ABC industrial zone tolled the bell for the dictatorship. One Sunday morning, my old accomplice Celso Castro, who had also worked full-time for the Lige during his exile, took me to an assembly of 80,000 workers, gathered in the São Bernardo do Campo stadium. Lula's talent as a popular agitator amazed me. The archbishop of São Paulo, Dom Evaristo Arns, came to support the

* Raul Pont, born 1944, mayor of Porto Alegre (Brazil) 1996–2000. Organised a participatory budget, and welcomed the first World Social Forums. An MP and leader of the Workers' Party (PT; Socialist Democracy current, formerly the FI section) in Rio-Grande-do-Sul state. Came second, with 48.5 per cent of votes, in the internal election for the presidency of the PT in 2005.

strikers, opening the churches for them to organise solidarity and food distribution. He asked the crowd to pray for the success of the struggle. In the absence of indigenous traditions of the workers' movement, this collective communion had the value of a solemn oath. There were few who abstained, as we did, from this act of faith. The red flags and the 'Internationale' appeared much later, in the late 1980s.

On Saturday evenings, the little world of PT and 'authentic' trade-union activists would meet up at the Paulistano da Gloria, a dance-hall with a 1930s atmosphere, where black musicians dressed up to the nines would play sambas generously watered by beer and caipirinhas. Between two numbers, the latest union gossip would circulate, and conspiratorial exchanges were lost in the smoke. At the beginning of this decade, Chico Buarque sung along with Maria Bethania, while Milton Nascimento honoured 'Minas' and 'Gerais'. Gal Costa evoked in his 'India' a melancholy Paraguay; Egberto Gismonti jazzed up circus music; Rita Lee, with her 'Lança Perfume', raised the banner of rock in the country of the bossa nova. The marvellous Ellis Regina, herself a PT sympathiser, stirred up the 'Águas de março'. I loved the flaxen hair of Sivuca and the north-eastern music of Valdir Azevedo. I do not know what subtle African *métissage* metamorphosed the rough hissing of the Portuguese language into solar caresses.

At this time, a certain Dr Socrates helped the Corinthians football team to their heyday. A PT sympathiser, he urged his teammates to resort to self-management in order to resist the exploitation of their labour-power imposed by trainers and managers. The Porto Alegre Internationals (with red and black colours in memory of the Italian libertarian émigrés who had founded the club) gloried under the management of Falcao. All this reminded me of my feelings as a young ball-boy. During a memorable TFC-Botafogo match in the Toulouse stadium, I was privileged to enter the dressing room and imbibe the camphor liniment smell of the legendary Didi and Garrincha, who beat the French team of Kopa and Fontaine in the semi-final of the 1958 World Cup.

In the early 1980s, like an Appian Way to the glory of capital, the Avenida Pauliste lined up its triumphant bank buildings with their smoked-glass windows as if all the surplus-value extracted from the poor suburbs and latifundias was hoarded in their glass and concrete. Here and there, a rickety colonial villa still survived, like a weed in

the cracks in the road, crushed by this pretentious modernity. In Amazonia, as if by contrast, a horde of *garimpeiros* with the look of tattered Egyptian slaves dug for gold on the sheer cliffs of the Serra Pelada. Thousands of kilometres from there, the new pyramids of the Avenida Paulista were built on the sweat and blood of the gold-diggers of this new Klondike, where mortal accidents were commonplace.

In 1983, the country was at fever pitch following the death of Tancredo Neves, the first president elected after the fall of the dictatorship, a few hours after his investiture. The Brazilian people learned on this occasion to hum the national anthem, solemnly sung by Fafa de Belém, draped in an immense flag embroidered with the Positivist motto celebrating order and progress (order, above all!). To familiarise myself with the language, I spent my few solitary moments reading the *Sertões* of Euclides da Cunha, following the desolate 'dry lives' of Graciliano Ramos, and losing myself in the luxuriance of Guimarães Rosa. I learned the stories of Tiradentes and Antonio Conselheiro, the epic of great Lampião and Maria Bonita:¹⁰ they reminded me of my local cinema club. To understand the popular mystique and the roots of the famous commune of Canudos, which resisted the decimal system and the murderous expeditions of the Postivist republic, I immersed myself in *Cangaceiros e Fanáticos* by Rui Faco.¹¹

I spent hours and days chatting with tiny groups that had painfully emerged from their hibernation under the dictatorship, and following the promising blossoming of the Workers' Party. I visited Paulo Skromov, president of the little leather-workers' union, in his shabby office.* A Trotskyist by education, he was one of the core of union leaders who established the PT in 1978. He was a tranquil and rotund giant, receiving in his capharnaëum workers with hollow cheeks and missing teeth. He was supported by a kind of Father Joseph, a young student of insatiable curiosity, wrapped up in a red scarf, who spoke through his nose while shuffling oddly from one foot to the other, like a rabbi in front of the Wailing Wall.¹²

No doubt because of the weak Stalinist tradition, anti-Trotskyist prejudices were weaker in Brazil than in many other countries. When the PT was founded, membership card no. 1 was

* Paulo Skromov, former Lambertist militant, co-founder of the PT, president of the leatherworkers' union in São Paulo.

symbolically reserved for Mario Pedrosa,* the only Latin American to have attended the founding congress of the Fourth International and been a member of its leadership, at the start of the Second World War, along with the Jamaican C.L.R. James and Max Shachtman. A young militant typesetter from Pernambuco, Paulo Roberto Pinto, known as 'Jeremias', was also well known for his role in the training of peasant militias. Murdered by latifundists in an ambush on 8 August 1963, his short life was sung about even in Spanish prisons in the 1970s:

They killed you in cold blood, the murderous latifundists
While you were marching at the head of five hundred peasants
Comrade Jeremias, your death will be avenged . . . †

First and foremost, the Workers' Party expressed a strong class feeling. Its rapid rise translated the development of a massive industrial proletariat resulting from the impetuous growth of the 1970s. But it also succeeded in extending its support to the countryside, thanks to the Christian base communities influenced by liberation theology. Bringing together a large number of groups and currents, its unity and cohesion were forged around the initial trade-union core. In 1983, apart from São Paulo, where it obtained around 10 per cent thanks to Lula's personal prestige, the party's electoral result seemed disappointing: around 3 per cent as a national average. Some people prematurely concluded that the project was still-born. With a gaucho perseverance, Raul explained on the contrary that it was necessary to be patient, measure the lack of party tradition in the country, overcome the considerable obstacle of local caciques and clientele relations. He was right. Our comrades agreed that the construction of their own current was organically bound up with that of the Workers' Party, conceived not as a mere tactical opportunity but rather as a strategic orientation. The object, in fact, was to give the Brazilian working class, for the first time in its history, a major class party, pluralist and democratic. Programmatic and ideological definitions would follow in due course with collective experience.

* Mario Pedrosa also published a major work of art criticism. See the collective work *Mario Pedrosa e o Brasil* (Editora Fundação Person Abramo: São Paulo, 2001).

† 'Lo mataron en tiempo, latifundistas asesinos / Cuando marchaba al frente de quinientos campesinos / Camarada Jeremias, tu muerte sera vengada . . .' Drummond, 'José'.

The formation of the PT, however, bucked the trend in the landscape of the international left. Not only was it contemporary with the neoliberal counter-offensive in Europe and North America, but it was followed very soon by the first signs of de-industrialisation in certain Latin American countries. This 'Brazilian exception' contributed to the sparkle of the PT on the continent, where a new social movement was slowly recovering from the defeats and repression imposed by the military dictatorships. If it was only logical that most of its leaders were influenced by the Cuban revolution, the PT acquired right from the start a pluralist culture transmitted by anti-Stalinist currents. Thus, as distinct from the traditional Communist parties and a number of currents of the Latin American left, it did not experience the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Soviet implosion as questioning its own history.

Scarcely ten years after the first steps of the new party, Lula was the front-runner in the 1989 presidential election, before being beaten at the wire by an ephemeral adventure, Color de Mello. The same year, the Sandinistas lost the election in Nicaragua. This turning point opened a period of redefinition for the Brazilian party.

Between 1980 and 1990 I visited Brazil two or three times a year. In relation to the Argentinian nightmare of the 1970s, the experience was gratifying. A kind of militant trade developed with my Brazilian friends. I brought Dijon mustard or Armagnac (preferred, naturally enough, to export Cognac), and brought back in exchange the latest records, powdered *guarana*, and *caxaça*. Trying to improve the wretched finances of our young section, Joaquim asked me to bring with me each visit a cargo of henna – much in vogue, but impossible to find in Brazil. He decanted it into little sachets for sale at the price of gold on the beaches of Copacabana and Leblon.

In 1985 he introduced me to Isaac Axelrud, a former Communist militant and a well-known journalist, whose heavenly utopia had been shattered in 1956 by Khrushchev's revelations.* He had even considered suicide. Like many other Jewish internationalists returning from Stalinism, he had thought he could rebuild his identity by a pilgrimage to his roots. He hoped to find a pioneer socialism in Israel, but only found himself a colonist. He found his way back to Brazil

* Isaac Axelrud, member of the Brazilian Communist Party and then of the PT (Democracia Socialista). Journalist.

with the resignation of a dead soul. The birth of the Workers' Party rekindled in him the embers of hope. His encounter with the comrades of Socialist Democracy, and a belated reading of Trotsky, enabled him, he said, to give a new meaning to his life as a militant. He related his long *Bildungsroman* with the blue eyes of an eternal child, wide open with curiosity about the world, loyalty and innocence. He was one of the first to realise the importance of the growing movement of landless peasants, and cover it regularly in *Em Tempo*. Aged seventy-five, he left each morning for the Rodoviária, megaphone over his shoulder, where an uncomfortable bus took him to the occupied lands.

Isaac belonged to the circle of militants bound to us by a non-negotiable loyalty.¹³ At our first meeting he presented me with a little book published the previous year on the origins of the Middle East conflict. The dedication said simply: 'Comrade Daniel, if I had time, I would write it a bit differently.' But Isaac was in a hurry. Feeling the end of his irreproachable life approaching, he had other urgent tasks. The misery of the landless peasants could not wait.

In 1988, a celebration was held in Porto Alegre for the tenth anniversary of *Em Tempo*. The PT would soon win the municipality. Under the patronage of Raul Pont, Olivio Dutra, former leader of the bank workers' union, future mayor and governor of the state, took the stand, as well as Glavio Koutzii, an old acquaintance of ours who had escaped from the Argentinian disaster. The Mexican friend Sergio Rodriguez¹⁴ and myself spoke after him. The evening continued with a *churrasco* and a *guinche*. I danced with Neneca, a black woman from La Plata and another survivor of our *portena* tragedy, to heavy rock and roll. This was a kind of symbolic epilogue to the decade:

The festival is over . . .

. . . And now, José?

I did not return to Brazil until 2002, only following from a distance the development of the PT, particularly in the wake of Lula's second campaign in 1994. I was back in Porto Alegre in January 2002 and again in 2003, for the second and third World Social Forums. Things had changed a good deal since my first visit in 1980. The PT had run the city for twelve years already. Raul had been mayor from 1996 to 2000. Miguel Rosetto was deputy governor of the state of Rio Grande

do Sul.* Young activists covered with badges led visitors to his office with complicit smiles.

After the heavy defeats suffered by the Latin American peoples, the innocent fervour of the Forum testified to a vigorous renaissance of social movements and the emergence of a new planetary internationalism to meet the challenges posed by capitalist globalisation. For a whole week, Porto Alegre was transformed into the world capital of resistance, bristling with poppies and red flags. The Catholic university turned into a great souk, with a tangle of stalls, workshops and seminars. The most austere propaganda was side by side with the products of fair trade, in a pile of T-shirts and caps presided over of course by the picture of Che. In the crushing heat and humidity, the youth camp attracted some twenty thousand militants from Latin America, Japan, Europe, North America and South Korea . . . At the centre of the camp, a battery of computers linked to the internet were housed in a mud-brick barn built by 'eco' peasants (an amazing mix of technological modernity and traditional knowhow!), forming an electronic tower of Babel as active as the official press room of the UN or the Olympic Games.

Circulating in the overheated streets, you could sense the pride of taxi-drivers boasting of the cleanliness of their city. When I asked one of them sneakily whether this was really a PT municipality, he replied: 'Yes, but the left PT!' Having established a degree of trust, I told him that I knew Raul Pont. '*O Raul é um santo!*' he piously exclaimed. Matters soured when, wanting to please him, I mentioned the talent of Ronaldinho. By moving to Paris the local idol had betrayed his fans. The subject was taboo.

About the same size as Marseille, Porto Alegre is very spread-out (posing expensive problems of road maintenance for the municipality), but the city centre is small. Tens of thousands of participants in the forums constantly crossed paths in the cafés and hotels, and around the old market. Happy rediscoveries took place, with something of the flavour of the last Guermantes ball. After twenty or thirty years you would come across veterans of many desperate battles, survivors of lost campaigns, as well as returnees from ideological

* Miguel Rossetto (born 1960), co-founder of the PT, member of the Democracia Socialista tendency. Leader of the CUT trade union confederation, vice-governor of Rio Grande do Sul, minister for agrarian reform (2003–06).

exile of one kind or another. Heads were often bald, backs a little stooped, the skin blemished, the step less alert. But the heart was still the same despite the scars on the soul. These, at least, had not thrown in the towel: the gauchos, Raul, Miguel, Lucio and Ubiratan, but also the globetrotters of the 1970s who travelled a thousand uncertain paths: Adolfo Gilly, Emir Sader, Flavio Koutzii, Hugo Blanco (who came down from his Peruvian valley), Livio Maitan, Michel Warschawski, Tariq Ali, Luis Zamora, Armand Mattelart, Luciana Castellina . . . Now we exchanged email addresses. In this whirlpool of unrepentant revolutionaries, the dignitaries of social-liberalism cut a sorry figure. They contented themselves with turtive appearances, just so they could say that 'they were there'.

In 2002, I crossed paths with Jean-Pierre Chevènement, escorted by two faithful attendants: the journalist Philippe Cohen (a former Ligue member) and my old colleague Sami Naïr, also recycled under the republican tricolour. I was with Olivier Besancenot, still quite unknown four months before the presidential election of April 2002. I presented our postman prospective candidate to Monsieur Chevènement, who was then hovering around 10 per cent in the polls and starting to believe in his national destiny. From his historic perch, the Belfort republican stretched out a condescending hand. Annoyed by his superiority complex, I joked that he was on his last lap, whereas in five years the young postman would still be around. This was pure boasting on my part. We were not even sure of obtaining the five hundred signatures of elected representatives required for Olivier's candidacy. On 21 April 2002, the rising curve of Olivier almost crossed the falling one of the Belfort lion. It certainly would in due course.

In January 2003, the atmosphere of the third World Social Forum was palpably different from that of the previous years. The PT had just lost the governorship of Rio Grande do Sul. After twenty years of

* Michel Warschawski, born 1949, headed for Jerusalem aged sixteen with the Strasbourg Jewish Scouts. Joined *Margen*, from 1972 the Israeli Marxist Revolutionary Communist League. From 1984 active in the Alternative Information Centre, bringing together Palestinians and Israeli peace activists. In 1989 sentenced to twenty months' imprisonment for printing PFLP leaflets. Writer of many books.

Luis Zamora, born 1948, Argentinian. Under the military dictatorship he was behind various organisations standing up for human rights. A member of the MAS (Movimiento al Socialismo) co-founded by Nahuel Moreno, and presidential candidate in 1989 and 1995. Elected an MP in 1989 and 2001. In the MST (Movimiento Socialista de los Trabajadores) and then, in 2011, co-founder of Autodeterminación y Libertad.

campaigning, Lula had become the first worker president of Latin America. His victory was that of the PT, a party that had arisen from nothing in the late 1970s. It was also, to a degree, our own victory. The new government was a coalition. The PTers were in a majority, but they were joined with burdensome and compromising allies. Former Trotskyists (of the Lambertist tendency) held key posts in Lula's front rank: Antonio Palocci was economics minister, the former trade unionist Luiz Gushiken was in charge of communications, while Clara Ant, pioneer of Brazilian Lambertism, was President Lula's personal secretary.* And our old acquaintance Luis Favre, the former colleague and collaborator of Jean-Christophe Cambadélis, worked in perfect harmony with Marta Suplicy, the elegant lady mayor of São Paulo. Our comrade Miguel Rosetto carried the heavy responsibility of minister of rural development and agrarian reform, alongside a ministry of agriculture that was allocated to a direct representative of the latifundias.

The greater part of my visit was spent on meetings with our Brazilian comrades, who had got together for the first time since the formation of the new government. Certain still believed in the electoral illusion, quite understandably. But the ambiguous victory was full of contradictions. While urban social struggles had been muted for ten years, and the PT had recorded disturbing setbacks (including the loss of Rio Grande do Sul), Lula had done well on the basis of a heavily personalised campaign, thanks in particular to the erosion of support for the bourgeois parties. To reassure his allies and the markets, his campaign had been moderate, giving preventive pledges to the IMF and surrounding himself with individuals who were reassuring to business. Some comrades, however, saw his government as a kind of institutional dual power, between the economic and financial ministries under liberal influence, on one hand, and the social ministries of agrarian reform, the cities and the environment, on the other. A government with two heads and two souls?

In less than a year, it became quite evident that the relationship between these two souls was highly asymmetrical. Prestigious intellectuals were not tardy in reversing the formula of the presidential campaign that had promised the victory of hope over fear: fear now had the upper hand over hope.

* Clara Ant, Brazilian architect and politician, member of the current *Liberdade e Luta* (linked to Lambertism), member of the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* since its creation in 1980 and of the current *O Trabalho*. Later moved to the centre-right, was treasurer of the party, member of parliament, director of the *Instituto Lula*..

After the close of the 2003 World Social Forum, our comrades organised a seminar under the patronage of the Axelrud foundation, attended by guests from Europe¹⁶ and Latin America (Bolivia, Argentina, Paraguay, Mexico), as well as Brazilian intellectuals including the sociologist Chico de Oliveira and the philosopher Paulo Arantes. Most of them discovered here for the first time the explosive personality of 'the senatress', Heloísa Helena.* Acclamations, autographs, group photos: her arrival at the Forum did not go unnoticed.

A senator from Alagoas in the Nordeste, Heloísa had been a PT activist since the 1980s, and belonged to the Socialist Democracy tendency. Impassioned and intransigent, she had been an early spokesperson for the PT's senatorial group, and acquired tremendous popularity on a national scale. Firstly, for having refused in 2002 to be a candidate for the governorship of her state, when victory already seemed within her grasp: she rejected the alliances that the PT had made nationally behind Lula's presidential candidacy. It is true that parties which, seen from Rio or São Paulo, look like regular parliamentary formations, are often organically linked in the states of the Nordeste to the oligarchic mafia. When the January 2003 parliamentary session opened, Heloísa refused to ratify the appointment of the former director of the Bank of Boston to the head of the central bank. She also refused to vote, as the PT leadership demanded, for former president José Sarney as president of the Senate. In both cases, the party leadership proposed that she should abstain from the vote without making a public statement. This compromise was revealed by a press eager for *boatos* – gossip. When Heloísa appeared on television surrounded by two presidents of the PT, the old and the new, she remained silent, but two large tears rolled down her cheeks. The whole of Brazil wept with Heloísa.

Attached to the party whose star she had helped to shine for twenty long years, Heloísa was not cut out for the everyday politics of ambiguity and compromise. For her, as Péguy would have said, politics has not overshadowed mystery. She herself proclaimed loud and clear that she belonged to the camp of Joan of Arc rather than that of Galileo. She was happy to deal with established institutions, as long as the voice of conscience was served first.

* Heloísa Helena, born 1962, professor of epidemiology. Deputy mayor, MP and senator for the PT. Expelled for having refused to vote for anti-working class measures, she co-founded the Partido Socialismo e Liberdade (PSOL). Stood in the 2006 presidential elections as candidate of the Left Front (PSOL-PSTU-PCB), scoring 6.85 per cent.

An incendiary speaker, this tropical *pétroleuse* knew how to whip up crowds. And like Joan of Arc, she had to confront the coarse sexism of the parliamentary mob. Always dressed in T-shirt and jeans, she exceptionally appeared at the presidential investiture wearing a scarlet dress down to her knees. When some smutty senators laughed at her, she threatened one of them with a paper knife. This martial self-defence increased her popularity with Brazilian women, who had only too much experience of sexist violence.¹⁶

In 2003, I returned to Brazil three times, accompanied in July by Chico Louça. Just like twenty-three years earlier, João Machado and Joaquim Soriano came to meet us at the airport. A fine loyalty. The Avenida Paulista had already lost its proud aspect. Its pretentious buildings showed signs of decay. The Paulistano da Glória samba school was forgotten (does it still exist?). Chico Buarque was rarely seen. 'Lenin and the Tribalistas' were in vogue. Maria Rita's silky voice brought back memories of her mother, Ellis Regina, who had died at an early age. At the crossroads of Ipiranga and São João (sung by Caetano Veloso), the old Café Brahma still survived, a vestige of São Paulo a hundred years before, where Adoniran Barbosa sung the 'Muro da casa Verde' in a voice roughened by *caxaça*. At the back of the café, a tired pianist still churned out, to general indifference, the melancholy music of 'Fascinação'. You could believe you were hearing the ghost of Ellis Regina humming:

We met, that was all,
And I never did anything to try to please you,
Yet I love you, with a burning love
That I can never now get rid of . . .

What a hypocritical song! Of course she tried to please him, and vice versa.

Politically, too, the country had changed. Lula sat in the Planalto, where the generals had been enthroned. Since 1994, his PR advisers had set out to fashion him a respectable image. No more wrinkled suits and tousled hair. Ironically termed 'genetically modified' by the leaders of the landless peasant movement, President Luiz Inácio was now kitted out in made-to-measure suits, with his beard carefully groomed. The ex-Trotskyists in his entourage, who had rallied to the neoliberal model, were also dressed up to the nines.

Among our comrades, the disagreements of the previous year had

abated. Six months had been enough to make clear the dominant logic of the government: stability first – defeat inflation and reassure the markets! Only then, according to an incautious presidential formula, could ‘the spectacle of growth’ begin. From the height of his chariot, Father Christmas applauded, and God himself was amazed by the miracles proclaimed. In fact, record interest rates, the goal of an astronomic balance of payments surplus, the commitments made to the IMF, the payment of interest on the debt – all this contributed to strangling the economy. There was not a *real* left for the ‘zero hunger’ campaign, for agrarian reform or public investment. To the great relief of the markets, continuity prevailed over change.

On 15 December 2003, along with three other parliamentarians, our comrade Heloísa was expelled from the Workers’ Party by fifty-five votes to twenty-seven, officially for having flouted party discipline during a debate on pension reform. This verdict ended a trial that had been going on for more than eight months. The day after the verdict, a number of militants sported a black star as a sign of grief, in place of the PT’s red star. Famous intellectuals, PT supporters from the first days, publicly broke with the party.¹⁷

The meaning of these expulsions was clear enough. In a year of exercising power, the ‘new PT’ had attracted many careerists without an activist past, and transformed itself into a transmission belt for government policy, instead of representing, quite independently, social movements within a government coalition. The general neoliberal orientation was clearly proclaimed in the appointment to the head of the central bank of a former director of the Bank of Boston, in the acceptance of the debt, agreements with the IMF, compromise over the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas, pension reform, astronomic interest rates over 20 per cent on average, and the obsessive quest for a trade surplus of 4.5 per cent. In these conditions, unemployment steadily grew, child labour increased, and the great social reforms such as ‘zero hunger’ remained a dead letter.¹⁸

As spokesperson of the PT group in the Senate, Heloísa had fought in the front rank against similar policies by the two previous governments. Without denying what she stood for, she could not subscribe to the same thing on the part of a PT government. It was a question of conviction and conscience.

Whether large or small, theological or political, a trial always reveals much about the moral state of a society or a group. From Socrates to Jesus, from Joan of Arc to Uriel da Costa, Louis Capet to

Bukharin, who is the judge? The power to judge is exorbitant. Faced with a tribunal of priests and doctors, Joan might well have asked herself if she really was a heretic, and doubted her own cause. How can one claim to be right as a lone individual, against the Church or against the Party?

Who has made you into a judge? From the trial of Joan of Arc to that of Bukharin, it is always the same question of objective guilt in the eyes of the accusers, whether *raison d'état* or *raison d'église*. Before the court of God or History, dissidence is necessarily a heresy, 'objective' treason. Appealing from the visible to the invisible church, from the written to the unwritten law, from the Party to the class, from the state to humanity, only aggravates the case, adding to the crime of insubordination an unpardonable sin of pride.

Faced with the bureaucratic tribunal of cynical reason, Heloísa only listened to her own inner voice. Yet she did not receive the verdict with indifference. Expulsion remains expulsion. If you see the work of your life destroyed . . . then you have to rebuild, to reconstruct a socialist and democratic project. To start again. From the middle, of course, as you never start from nothing.

At the time that these lines are being written, it is impossible to predict how the experience of the Lula government will turn out. If the most powerful country on the continent is not capable, under a government of the left, to stand its ground against those whom Heloísa calls 'the gigolos of the IMF', to undertake a radical agrarian reform, what can one expect of the Bolivians, the Ecuadoreans or the Uruguayans?

On the thirtieth anniversary of the Chilean coup d'état of 11 September 1973, the European media risked an exercise of comparison between the 'Chilean road' and the 'Brazilian road'. Marco Aurelio Garia, a former militant from the Chilean MIR, today personal adviser to President Lula, declared on this occasion that 'the main lesson' of the Chilean tragedy was that 'a project of political transformation needs a strong system of alliances'.¹⁹ His comparison between Salvador Allende and Lula concluded in favour of the latter, who had been wise enough, even before his electoral triumph, to sweet-talk the markets and international creditors, to reassure the bosses at home and abroad. Marco Aurelio regretted with hindsight that the alliance envisaged in Chile between the Christian Democrats and the Popular Unity coalition had broken down, as if responsibility for this fell to an irresponsible 'forward flight' and radicalisation on the part of the Chilean left.

A faulty memory makes certain reminders necessary. Popular Unity won the Chilean presidential election of 4 September 1970 with 36.4 per cent of the vote. Salvador Allende was inaugurated on 4 November, after the Christian-Democrat parliamentary majority made his investiture conditional on respect for private property and non-interference with the army. After initiating agrarian reform, Popular Unity won the municipal elections of April 1971 with 50 per cent of the vote. Buoyed up by this, it nationalised the copper mines from which the country drew 80 per cent of its export earnings.

In June 1972, negotiations between Popular Unity and the Christian Democrats on the boundaries between the three sectors of the economy (private, public and mixed) were called off by the latter. August saw the start of an employers' strike against the regime by truck drivers and shopkeepers. The Christian-Democratic press then explained its strategy in crude military terms: 'Practice strategic retreat, let the enemy get bogged down in the heart of friendly territory, paralyse and weaken him by a scorched-earth policy, encircle and destroy him!' On 11 October 1972, a state of emergency was proclaimed in twenty-four out of twenty-five provinces, which were placed under military control. This 'October crisis' ended with the formation of a government including three generals. The leaders of the MIR stressed at this time that 'the inclusion of generals in the cabinet has substantially changed the character of the government', and that 'the popular parties were no longer its political fulcrum'.

In March 1973, Popular Unity still won 44 per cent of the vote in the legislative elections, to the great disappointment of the opposition, who had banked on the erosion of government support. The day of 2 June saw an uprising in Santiago by an armoured regiment. Allende called on the workers to defend the government, and the trade-union federation asked them to occupy workplaces. After the defeat of this '*tankaço*', negotiations between Popular Unity and the Christian Democrats led on 9 August to the formation of a new cabinet including the generals heading all three arms of the military. On 18 August, the generals left the government, returning in force a week later. Raids in the factories and trade-union offices became frequent. Repression against anti-fascist soldiers intensified in the army.

'When were we strongest?', the MIR leader Miguel Enriquez²⁰ asked at the end of July: just after the *tankaço*, with the forces of reaction on the defensive, the right divided and its activists forced to

hide? Or after the coalition agreement with the army chiefs, who obtained in return authorisation to disarm the organisations of popular power and the possibility of preparing their coup at the very heart of the government?

On 4 September, 800,000 people assembled outside the presidential palace to celebrate the third anniversary of the Popular Unity victory. Then 11 September saw Augusto Pinochet's coup d'état, and the death of Salvador Allende in the besieged Moneda.

This brief chronology reminds us how on many occasions Popular Unity sought to respond to the sabotage of the Chilean bourgeoisie and the plots of the CIA (the Condor plan since confirmed by published records) with a broadening of its alliances in the direction of the Christian Democrats and the military hierarchy. After the abortive coup in June and the formation of the coalition cabinet with the military, the general secretary of the Communist Party, Luis Corvalan, sought to reassure: 'There can be no doubt that the cabinet in which the three branches of the armed forces are represented constitutes a barrier against sedition.' The same man also incautiously decreed that 'in conformity with the constitution, the army does not interfere in politics' (*sic*).²¹

These alliances, like a knot around the neck of Popular Unity, certainly won in exchange concessions in terms of public order and social reforms susceptible of disorienting the popular classes and disarming their vigilance. According to Marco Aurelio Garcia, the revolutionary left committed the mistake of 'boxing itself into a false position, seeking to constitute an absolute alternative instead of being the critical component of Popular Unity'. This retrospective balance sheet was certainly designed as a warning for the present. Marco Aurelio, however, knew perfectly well, having been a member of it, that the MIR had supported the Allende government without joining it, even acting as the president's personal guard. He must therefore have remembered that the MIR began to negotiate its participation in the government in 1972, which it had however to abandon in the face of the concessions made to the bourgeoisie, the pledges given to imperialism, and the rightward economic course – imposed in particular by the Communist Party.

Expanding on the theme of the Chilean lessons, Marco Aurelio today pays homage to the lucidity of the Italian Communist leader of the time, Enrico Berlinguer, who had understood from the start that 'it is impossible to govern with a weak majority'. The Chilean

tragedy, in fact, immediately served as a pretext for the respectful European left to justify the Italian 'historic compromise', the 'union of the left' in France, and the 'Moncloa pact' in Spain. What is the result, a quarter of a century later? In Italy, the historic compromise demobilised the social movement, built up growing frustration, and paved the way for the buffoonery of Berlusconi. By sacrificing the social alternative to alliances at the top, the leaders of the governmental left certainly avoided the risk of a coup d'état. But the price of this was getting bogged down in crisis, capitulation all along the line to liberal counter-reform, the rising power of far-right populism and the methodical self-destruction of the Eurocommunist parties.

Recollection of the Chilean experience in the form of a funeral oration leads to a parallel between the Chilean and Brazilian models. The second fortunately does not seem threatened by a military coup in the foreseeable future. Experience of dictatorship is too recent. Above all, neither the possessing classes in Brazil nor international capital feel themselves threatened to the point of envisaging such extreme recourse. They prefer to bank on the experiment wearing itself out and breaking up.²²

If the neoliberal policy followed by the Lula government should continue in the same direction, it cannot be ruled out, unfortunately, that in a few years' time the 'Brazilian model' will appear in hindsight as an example of inglorious capitulation. The Indian tribes of Québec used to hang beneath their tents, or near their windows, a round object like a drum decorated with feathers or leather strips, with a kind of net in the middle. This was a dream-catcher. Its mesh was supposed to repel bad dreams and keep in good ones. The Workers' Party is a kind of dream-catcher which, on contact with power, starts to function in reverse, keeping in the bad dreams and rejecting the good ones.

They will no longer be able to say that I was resigned
And that I wasted my best days.

Within me, at the bottom,

Are immense reserves of time,

Future, post-future, past

There are Sundays, regattas, processions

There are proletarian myths and underground conduits

Feverish windows, masses of salt water, mediation and sarcasm.

No one will silence me, I shall continue to shout

Each time that a pleasure is repressed, I shall raise up those who
are discouraged
I shall negotiate in hushed tones with conspirators,
I shall convey messages that people are not used to sending or
receiving
I shall be the clown in the circus,
I shall be the most everyday and human things, but also the most
exceptional ones [. . .]
It all depends on the moment
And on a certain fairy inclination
That lives in me like an insect*

And now?

* 'Ja nao dirao que estou resignado / E perdi os melhores dias. / Dentro de mim, bem no fundo, / Ha reservas colossais de tempo, / Future, pos-futuro, préterito, / Ha domingos, regatas, procissoes, / Ha mitos proletarios, condutos subterraneos, / Janela em febre, masses de agua salgade, meditacao et sarcasmo. / Ninguem me fera calar, gritei sempre / Que se abafa un prazer, apontarei os desanimados, / Negociarei em voz baixa com os conspiradores, / Transmitireai recados que nao se usa dar nem receber, / Serei, no circo, o palhaço, / Serei as coisas mais ordinarias et humanas, e tambem as excepcionais [. . .] / Tudo depende da hora / E de certa inclinacao fêérica, / Viva en mim qual um inseto. / José, e agora?' Drummond, 'José'.

Spectres of the Blue House

A strange and horrible curiosity that impels people to direct their gaze into tombs of the past! That happens in extraordinary times, at the end of a finished era, or immediately before a catastrophe.

– Heinrich Heine, *On Germany*

We are walking in this paradise garden surrounded by ghosts with a hole in their foreheads.

– Natalia Sedova

Ghosts. Ghosts certainly lived here.

– Malcolm Lowry, *Under the Volcano*

From 1983 on, we held an annual meeting of our sections and sympathising groups in Latin America. This took place alternately in Mexico, at social centres, or in Brazil, at monasteries close to São Paulo or Porto Alegre. Solid links of politics and friendship were made on these occasions.

Helped along by tequila or *caipirinha*, the social evenings resembled family celebrations: everyone present made their contribution. The Mexicans, with misted eyes, belted out *corridos* telling of unhappy loves and torn hearts. A Mexican-American woman comrade sung ‘Summertime’ almost as well as Janis Joplin. The laurels went to Juju Guimarães, a sensitive and ceremonious *mineiro*. After having been begged – for form’s sake – he set the scene, evoking Rick’s bar in *Casablanca*, with Bogart’s elegance and the mystery of Ingrid Bergman . . . Then he dragged us into a whirlpool of shared melancholy: ‘As time goes by . . .’¹

The start of the 1980s was marked by the Central American revolutions and the fall of the dictatorships in the southern cone. El Salvador and Guatemala were in a state of civil war. Bolivia and

Paraguay seemed possible weak links. Christophe Aguiton set off to explore Paraguay, and we sometimes met up again in Mexico. Dressed in the baggy pants of an Egyptian fellah, Christophe took advantage of his time off to set out at great strides to climb the pyramids or Popocatepetl, under the incredulous gaze of our Mexican friends: '*Está loco, this Frenchman!*'

Our Mexican section was rapidly growing. It had won a substantial audience, particularly due to the democratic campaigns in support of Rosario Ibarra.* This attractive little woman, whose son had been kidnapped some twenty years earlier by the gangsters of the PRI regime, was the spokesperson for the movement of mothers and partners of the disappeared. Margarito Montes Parra, a young agricultural engineer, lively and full of fun, led the land occupations that won whole villages to the PRT.†

* María del Rosario Ybarra de la Garza, more commonly known as Rosario Ibarra, was born in Saltillo, Coahuila, Mexico in 1927. Came to prominence during the Dirty War in Mexico, when her son Jesús Piedra Ybarra was disappeared on 19 April 1975 following the murder by the 23 September Revolutionary League of policeman Guillermo Valdez Villarreal. This led her to co-found the Comité Eureka, one of the most prominent groups for the advocacy of the disappeared in Mexico. Her activism led her to join the Mexican Section of the reunified Fourth International, the Revolutionary Workers' Party (Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores – PRT). She became their presidential candidate during the 1982 election – the first woman to run for the Mexican presidency. Left the PRT to join the Party of the Democratic Revolution (Partido de la Revolución Democrática – PRD), and became a member of Congress in their line, beginning a long history as one of the most left-wing figures in the Mexican legislature occupying seats in both chambers at various times – albeit not continuously. Beginning in 2006, she joined the Labor Party (Partido del Trabajo – PT), of Maoist origin, but tightly allied to the PRD – this move was due to a negotiation rather than an ideological switch as part of the creation of the Broad Progressive Front, the left-wing coalition in the legislature. Retired in 2012, but remains active and was part of the broad protest movement in Mexico.

† Margarito Montes Parra, born 1953 in Sonora, Mexico. A young agricultural student in the early 1970s, he became active in the Mexican section of the reunified Fourth International, the PRT, rising to the leadership of their rural component at a national level, and particularly in the northern states, such as his home state of Sonora. He founded the General Workers, Peasants, and Peoples Union (Unión General Obrero, Campesino y Popular – UGOCP) in the mid-1970s, initially as a way to develop a mass movement for agrarian reform and for popular self-defence from the land owners' thugs and from the corrupt state and federal police forces. From this initial experience, he built his own power base, increasingly becoming less and less of a cadre of the PRT, and more and more of a traditional warlord. He would incorporate the UGOCP in 1986 and subsequently claimed this as the official founding date. This is now a national organisation that is a combination of a charity, a business, and a political association. His break with the left would not become complete until the 1990s, when he grew close to Institutional Revolutionary Party officials, and became a millionaire, arguably by ranching and agricultural micro-lending, but always with rumors of smuggling and drug trafficking as well as economic corruption involving the dues collected from tens of thousands of members of the UGOCP. After a

Mario Payeras, one of the founders of the Guatemalan guerrilla, had retreated to Mexico in the mid-1980s, following the failed insurrection in Guatemala City. The author of a short book on the experience of the beginnings of the rural guerrilla, *Los Dias de la selva*, he had just finished another on the failure of the urban uprising, *El Trueno en la ciudad*. On the eve of the victory of the triumphant Sandinista insurrection of 1979, the revolutionary movements in El Salvador and Guatemala seemed most experienced and best established. The break in the Nicaraguan weak link was not entirely good news for them. It had mobilised imperialism in the region, and attracted military advisers and mercenaries from all directions. Whereas they had believed they were fighting broken-down dictatorships, the Guatemalan revolutionaries found themselves confronted by the trained strategists of counter-insurrection. For Payeras, this was a major lesson from the defeats in El Salvador and Guatemala.

We were expecting from him a course on the arts and techniques of guerrilla warfare, but he surprised us by recommending we should first of all go back to studying the fundamentals, starting with Liddell Hart² and the classics of strategy. In the new situation, the force of example, Guevarist voluntarism and the accumulated knowhow of the Cubans were no longer enough. With the support of testimonies, Payera explained the giddiness that could seize an armed movement in a country devastated by poverty. Rebellion rapidly gathered destitute adolescents and declassed soldiers, lacking historical knowledge or political education. These unattached oppressed readily understood the revolution as a simplified war of the poor against the rich. Without a strong political backbone, or a coherent and experienced party, Payeras maintained – against the theses earlier put forward by Debray in *Revolution in the Revolution* – that armed struggle was

period of in-fighting in the late 1990s, and a major split in his organisation that took a violent turn – the leader of the rival group was murdered in mysterious circumstances, his organisation having increasingly become mired in the Sonoran drug wars, whether directly or indirectly is not clear – and Montes was assassinated, along with fourteen relatives, friends and bodyguards in an ambush performed by one of the cartels vying for Sonoran territory on 30 October 2009. This massacre was front page news in the north of Mexico, and was indeed a tragic end for someone who only thirty-five years before had promised to become by sheer charisma and commitment the rising star of a new generation of Mexican Trotskyism. While the organisation survived him and still exists, it has become increasingly distanced from its militant past and from Montes's own later trajectory.

pregnant with uncontrollable violence and drifting. Coming from a veteran of both rural and urban guerrilla, this neoclassicism clearly heralded a change of strategic sequence.

Brazil is the land of the Kantian sublime: the arid expanses of the *sertões*, the luxuriant sugar-loafs, the colourful birds, a virgin land scarcely covered with a film of historic sediment. In Mexico, by contrast, history is everywhere. The land and the towns are saturated with it. The history of modern revolutions is superimposed on that of the indigenous civilisations destroyed by colonisation. In the capital, the avenue of Reforma intersects that of Insurgentes. Near the Zócalo, you can almost expect to see Zapata and Villa arriving, hats in hand, up in their stirrups, under the mosaic frontage of Sanborns. On the frescoes of the presidential palace, surrounded by workers in caps, scientists in overalls and heroic aviators, Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky prophesy a better world.

In the 1980s, the Revolutionary Workers' Party (PRT), the Mexican section of the Fourth International, had the wind in its sails. Following the banking crisis of 1982, the hegemony of the ruling Institutional Revolutionary (*sic*) Party, in power for half a century, was crumbling under the weight of corruption. The populist state established in the 1930s under the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas was staggering under the shock of liberal globalisation. The pressure of the North American neighbour was growing. In 1986, the PRT won six seats in the Chamber of Deputies, including one for Rosario Ibarra. Meetings and congresses reflected the dynamic of confidence of an organisation borne up by success. Peasants dressed in white cloth, as if out of a Kazan film, came in compact groups. They attended in silence Byzantine debates on the variants of international Trotskyism or the analysis of petroleum rent, waiting without budging for the blessed moment of the refreshment break. The participants then regaled themselves on beef accompanied by *moros y cristianos*.

During one congress, a young and enigmatic *peon* who was seated next to me asked whether the red flag decorating the platform really was that of Zapata's insurrectionaries, whom his father and grandparents had spoken about. There were old peasants in Morelos who kept, folded carefully in their hats, the property deeds that had been handed them by Zapata himself. You could still encounter at meetings some veterans in their nineties, toothless with chiselled faces, who had known in their youth the legendary revolutionary immortalised by John Reed and Eisenstein, Kazan and Sergio Leone.

For these peasants, the important business of the congress took place between the plenary sessions. They met then in small groups, by villages or states. As in a well-ordered scrum in the Toulouse stadium, all you could see was their backs. The stifled murmur of a secret conclave arose from this compact huddle. When the backs straightened up, their decision was taken. Exactly how was a mystery. Not by vote, at all events. In their communal culture, the modern democratic principle of 'one man or one woman = one vote' was unknown. Talk, synthesis, consensus – an African-style democracy. The coexistence within the same organisation of modern democratic practices based on public opinion and this organic direct democracy raised several problems. Peasants joined the party by families or groups. Their block votes weighed heavily in the debates. Nor did the internal discussion bulletins mean much to them. Very few could read Spanish. The village bell called them to assemble, and one of them would give a public reading of the newspaper or a document. In these gatherings, the famous dividing line between party and class that Lenin drew in *What Is to Be Done?* became very unclear.

In Mexico, reality often goes beyond fiction. The country itself is a legend, full of colourful novelistic characters of the likes of Juan Rulfo, José Revueltas or Carlos Fuentes. Margarito Montes was one of these. In the late 1980s, he won a national reputation. The press spoke of him as a 'northern Zapata'. After leading a number of armed land occupations, he drew the conclusion that these would remain a perpetual and sterile repetition, unless the land won was put to productive use. He developed an experience of this kind in the fertile region of Cuenca del Papaloapan. In 1988, after the fraudulent election of the '*pelon*',³ Salinas de Gortari, Margarito turned up in Mexico City with two or three Dodge vans, conspicuously filled with armed bodyguards and equipped with ghetto-blasters playing at full volume the hits of Pedro Infante and Jorge Negrete.

Short and thickset, and ever ready to laugh, Margarito was an all-round individual, passionate about literature and proud of his Yaki⁴ origins. Mexican sensibility is readily effusive. An orator vibrating with emotion, Rosario Ibarra knew how to play on this string and give a meeting of tough characters gooseflesh. When she paid tribute to Margarito, who was sitting beside her on the platform, evoking his epic peasant struggles, the fighter started to snuffle, and pulled from his pocket a large checkered handkerchief that he drenched in great tears. But he was not just another adventurer. He had worked for the

International as an agronomist with the continent's agrarian movements, crossing Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Colombia and the Dominican Republic. He had acquired a rich experience.

Under the presidency of the 'usurper' Salinas, the wind began to change. The NAFTA treaty between Mexico, Canada and the United States pushed forward a modernisation of agriculture. The government would probably have been able to tolerate and use to a certain point the extra-legal activities of Margarito, to get rid of archaic relations and reduce the weight of certain caciques. He himself ended up seeing agricultural modernisation as inevitable. Better then to negotiate its modalities than to cling on to the myths of the Mexican revolution and be worn out in a rearguard struggle lost in advance.

In a country where corruption is an institution of public life, popular wisdom maintains that no one has ever resisted very long a bombardment of pesos. From a social brigand in the service of the poor, Margarito too ended up as a kind of warlord.

Mexico is a land of ghosts and phantoms, with its train of twitching skeletons and grinning death's heads that fill Posada's lithographs.⁵ For more than thirty years, after the model of the 'mothers of the May Square' in Argentina, Rosario Ibarra has not ceased fighting for her disappeared son to be restored to life.

In 1986, the PRT won a small rural municipality in Morelos against the bureaucrats of the PRI. The installation of the new team was the occasion for a fiesta. A PRT representative arrived in one of the Chamber of Deputies' official vehicles, accompanied by Álvaro, a comrade of Colombian origin responsible for solidarity with the Central American revolutions. During the festivities, while alcohol flowed freely, incidents broke out with the strong men of the outgoing municipal team. As in *The Magnificent Seven*, the peasants organised self-defence. At the end of this *borracho*, Álvaro was missing. His comrades found him dead, stifled by his own tongue or by vomit.

The matter was an awkward one for the villagers. It was a bad way to begin the new municipal era. Investigation, evidence, complications: it would be a fine opportunity for the despised authorities to poke their noses into things. The villagers preferred therefore not to report the death locally. The comrades from the capital had to leave with Álvaro's body tied inside the parliamentary vehicle. You can imagine the silent dead man, rocking, wobbling, bumping up and down with the potholes. Like an incident from a Buñuel film, the convoy stopped in several villages to buy a leftover coffin from the

local undertaker. In the absence of a death certificate or burial permit, most of them refused. Finally, an understanding shopkeeper agreed, for a bribe (*mordida*), to provide a whitewood box. Comrade Álvaro could be given a decent end to his mortal ride. It was still necessary, in order to find him a final resting-place, to convince the competent authorities and obtain the papers needed.

Nothing should surprise one in Mexico. It is a haunted country, a land of spectres. That of Zapata, riding the hills of Morelos on his white horse. That of Ambrose Bierce, the old gringo, whom the revolution evaporated into a cloud of dust and mescal.^{*} Those of '*el México bronco*',[†] of John Reed and Eisenstein.

Those of the blue house.

In autumn 1986, Sophie had an unexpected opportunity to join me in Mexico. It was a year after the earthquake. Many avenues were still marked by hollowed-out buildings and rubble from crumbled walls.

Naturally, we made the pilgrimage to Coyoacán.

A young volunteer comrade acted as guardian of Trotsky's house on the calle Viena. He led the rare visitors to the tomb of the Old Man, overgrown with weeds. He guided them through the rooms of the house in which time had stood still: the impact of the raid by Siquieros's thugs on the bedroom wall, the diary still open on the desk where the murderer's pick had fallen, the dusty books. The moonstruck student lived here among the shades. From his dialogue with these revenants, hearing the night-time whispers of the guards, crossing the shades of Joe Hansen, Jean van Heijenoort, Sheldon Hart (kidnapped by the killers) or Ramón Mercader, he suffered nightmares and insomnia.[‡]

* Ambrose Bierce, 1842–1913, American journalist, short story writer, fabulist, and satirist.

† Joseph (Joe) Hansen, 1910–79, joined the US Communist League in 1934. Secretary and bodyguard of Leon Trotsky up to his assassination. Editor of *The Militant* and member of the US SWP national committee 1940–75. Upon the reunification of the FI – for which he had fought – he became one of its leaders, and editor of *Inprecor*.

Jean Van Heijenoort, 1912–86, spent seven years at Trotsky's side managing his secretarial team, before and during the war, working to ensure the continuity of the FI. He then abandoned politics to focus on his work as a mathematician, in which field he was a world-renowned specialist. His writings often appeared under the pseudonym Marc Loris.

Robert Sheldon Harte, 1917–40, a member of the US SWP and Trotsky's bodyguard. He was disappeared and then murdered during the failed attempt on Trotsky's life of 24 May 1940.

Ramón Mercader (alias Jacques Mornard or Frank Jacson), 1913–79, linked to the Spanish Communist Youth and a lieutenant in the militias in 1937. Inveigled his way into Trotsky's circle in Mexico, murdering him on Stalin's orders in 1940. He spent his last days in Cuba, and was buried with full honours in Moscow upon his death.

In contrast to this haphazard mausoleum, the blue house on avenida Londres was all luxuriance. An explosion of blue and green. A wildness tamed by colour, as in a painting by Douanier Rousseau.

One can understand how the Old Man, landing at Tampico on 9 January 1937 after a long wandering across Europe and a sinister stay in Norway with GPU agents at his heels, could have believed, in this garden of delights, the possibility of a new start, beginning afresh in a new country as striking in colour as the long winter nights in Oslo had been grey and glacial. A new continent, a new International. And also a new love! As if this general rejuvenation were the bearer of a thousand promises. As if it offered the possibility of tearing off the Nessus tunic of defeats and escaping their hellish repetition in this great explosion of sunshine.

Of the group of friends who came to welcome Leon and Natalia at the port of Tampico, a slight figure wrapped in a bright *rebozo* stood out: Frida Kahlo, like an Aztec goddess, decorated with jewels of stone and metal. A flutter of eyelashes overlooking an intense gaze. 'A ribbon around a bomb', André Breton said of her.

Trotsky was already known as the Old Man. Yet the organiser of the Red Army, the exile of Alma Ata and Prinkipo, the planetary pariah without a visa, was not really so old. In 1937 he was just fifty-eight, but fifty-eight years heavy with all the forced wandering, all the tiredness of exile, the physical and moral wounds, burdened by a frustrated desire to act, reduced to prophetic commentary on coming tragedies. Stepping onto Mexican soil, which still vibrated with the hoofs of revolutionary riders, meant stepping into a new world after failing to change the world. It was the glimpsed possibility of a rearmament of hearts and minds.

You can imagine his arrival in a house of such warm hospitality. All that blue. All that green. All that sensual vitality. The paintings with the enigmatic face of Frida, sculpted in a controlled pain. 'Fate has shark's teeth,' she said. She knew what she was talking about, having experienced its bite for herself. But both always had the impulse to go forward. Never mind her mutilated leg, she said, she still had wings to fly. Rivera spoke lovingly of her as 'an explosion of joy and colours emerging from the shadows of pain'.

He, the muralist, was ogre and lover, greedily physical, as if inspired by the memory of those cannibal Indians who cooked their *potzole* with the flesh of human sacrifice. He painted the cavalcade of Mexican history in frescoes conceived as a public and popular art.

The blue house on avenida Londres appeared therefore as the cradle of a possible renewal and renaissance. As the propitious site of a political and amorous spring. As a sunny period, a clearing, an air lightened by a breeze. But the killers were not far away. They had never given up. They were on the prowl in Coyoacán, observing the house, polishing their plans.

In 1929, Juan Antonio Mella, the young founder of Cuban Communism, had been killed in Mexico coming out of a cinema.* The thugs of the dictator Machado were accused. But Mella, who had travelled to Moscow for the red trade-union international, sympathised with Andreu Nin.† The rumour ran that he had made connections with the Left Opposition. In 1929, after the expulsion of Trotsky from the Party and from the Soviet Union, the witch-hunt was on.

Mella was killed like a dog, perhaps by agents of the Cuban dictator. He died in the arms of his mistress, the Italian photographer Tina Modotti, a friend of Frida. Tina returned to Mexico in 1940 with her new partner Vidali (one of the GPU killers in the Spanish civil war), shortly before Ramon Mercader's crime. She was suspected of complicity in Trotsky's murder, or at least of a shady role. It was hard to tell double or triple agents in this world of masks, false passports and false identities. The world of Charles Plisnier and Victor Serge, Ignaz Reiss and Krivitsky.⁷

In this ephemeral spring of 1937, as if to better forget the tentacles reaching out for him, Leon entertained himself in the blue house. He played Pygmalion, lending Frida his books (Jack London, Ibsen, Dos Passos, Malraux, Tolstoy, Serge, Taine – even Maurras!). He recommended her to read Freud, banned in the Soviet Union since 1930 at the same time as surrealism, by the Kharkov congress at which Aragon won his spurs as a servile intellectual.⁸ In the books that he lent, the Old Man slipped carefully folded love letters, just like a

* Juan Antonio Mella, 1903–29, organiser of student resistance in Cuba, and a founder of the Communist Party. Accused of terrorism, he was forced into exile in Mexico, where he planned a landing on his home island and the assassination of its dictator Machado. Having met Andreu Nin at the congress of the Profintern, and having had contacts with Left Oppositionists, he was assassinated in mysterious circumstances.

† Andreu Nin, 1892–37, a teacher, secretary of the CNT and the Profintern, he was a member of the Moscow Soviet and the Left Opposition, before being expelled in 1931. Back in Spain, he established the Izquierda Comunista (Communist Left), which went on to be part of the POUM, of which he was the secretary. During the Spanish Revolution, he joined the Catalan government. Arrested, tortured and murdered by the Stalinists, falsely accused of collaboration with the fascists.

schoolboy. He cannot have been unaware of the folly of this juvenile intrigue. To exorcise ridicule, he publicly ironised: 'My vice is to be over fifty-five. Lenin said that after thirty, revolutionaries are only good for shooting.' Oh, that Lenin – never one to miss the opportunity to crack a joke! He had not survived for this vice of the over fifties, but Leon had. And he was here, ready to play the role of grey-beard secretly chasing youth, under the disapproving yet complicit eye of his austere bodyguards. Frida did not have these scruples. 'Love', she said, 'is like revolution: it comes and it goes. One never loves enough.'

The illusory hope of having shed the old skin, left behind a continent collapsing into tragedy, was of short duration. On 19 January, scarcely settled in Coyoacán, Trotsky and Natalia were struck by tragedy. The radio announced the start of the second Moscow trial, that of Bukharin. Right to the end, the Old Man tried to believe he could collect his cactuses and feed his rabbits as if nothing was wrong. Deep inside, however, he knew he was condemned. 'We are Babouvists who still have our heads on our shoulders, but for how long?', said Victor Serge.*

Even more than the first Moscow trial, the second was a show of automata, a theatre of shadows, in which the accused continued to play his role although he no longer existed as a person. 'That innocence is forced to plead guilty is the secret of perfect obedience, the unimpugnable index of totalitarian terror,' said Trotsky. Totalitarian! A word that did not scare him. He understood, on the contrary, the mutual attraction of the two totalitarianisms, which gravitated around one another like binary stars, not identical but twins all the same. And he was one of the few people to be scarcely surprised by the Nazi–Soviet pact of 1939 and the partition of Poland. That disaster, which inspired Walter Benjamin's testamentary theses on the logic of history, was the logical dénouement of the mutual attraction between two antagonistic systems, governed by the same cynical rationale.

Faced with the Stalinist trials, and the target of a ceaseless campaign of slander, his archives still hardly unpacked, Trotsky busied himself in the blue house. He pressed his friends (George Novack, Max Shachtman and James P. Cannon in the United States, Naville and Rosmer in France) to set up a commission of inquiry and a court of

* Babouvists were the followers of François-Noël Gracchus Babeuf (1760–97), the first communist figure of the post-French Revolution period.

honour.' He was not concerned to vindicate himself personally, but to defeat a monstrous historical falsification, a monumental lie. There is in fact no guarantee that history ever delivers justice, that a historical last judgement exists. If one does nothing, the lie can establish itself in the place of truth. It was not a matter of Trotsky's own place in history, he said, but 'of all our phantoms, all those who have struggled and will struggle for human emancipation, as the crimes committed in the name of socialism compromise the future'.

Spectres and phantoms, again. Who would be condemned to wander forever, to repeat interminably the story of their defeats and their sufferings, to indefinitely put up with injustice, so long as the lie carried the day.

* George Novack, 1905–92, having studied at Harvard, Novack joined the Trotskyists' Communist League of America in 1933 and was secretary of the Socialist Workers' Party USA from 1940 to 1973. Secretary of the Moscow Trials-era American Committee for the Defence of Leon Trotsky, and active in the campaign against the imprisonment of SWP members during WWII under the anti-communist Smith Act.

Max Shachtman, 1904–72, an early leader of the US Communist Party, before being expelled together with James P. Cannon and Martin Abern in 1928 on account of their support for the Left Opposition in Russia. Among the founders of the Communist League. Entered into dispute with Trotsky firstly in 1938, for publishing an article by James Burnham rejecting dialectical materialism, then again because he disputed the position of 'unconditional defence of the USSR' after that country invaded Poland and Finland in 1939–40. Split to form the Workers' Party. Became a theorist of 'bureaucratic collectivism', maintaining that the Soviet bureaucracy was not just a parasitic caste on a degenerated workers' state, but rather a historically novel type of ruling class. Went on to adopt flatly anti-communist positions, including support for the Bay of Pigs invasion and war in Vietnam.

James P. Cannon, 1890–1974, having begun his political life in the Socialist Party and as a travelling organiser for the Industrial Workers of the World union, Cannon joined the Communist Labor Party of America and then the Communist Party after the First World War. Having visited Moscow, he supported the Left Opposition, and was thus expelled from the CP. Co-founder of the Communist League and then the Socialist Workers' Party, he was jailed under the Smith Act during WWII. Prominent in the 1952 split in the FI (a protagonist of the International Committee), he also supported the 1963 reunification. Wrote histories of US Trotskyism.

Pierre Naville, 1904–93, French surrealist. In 1922 founded *L'œuf dur* (Hard-Boiled Egg). Co-editor of *La Révolution Surréaliste* with Benjamin Péret, he also collaborated with André Breton. Joined the PCF in 1926, working on *Clarté*, but expelled in 1928 due to his support for Trotsky. Broke with the Surrealists in order to focus on more traditional political activity, as a prominent leader of the Ligue Communiste, but then also grew disenchanted with the Trotskyists by 1939. Later in the PSU.

Alfred Rosmer, 1877–1964, historic leader of French syndicalism. In the PCF from 1920, only to be expelled along with erstwhile leader Boris Souvarine in 1924 as the party was 'Bolshevised' under the orders of Zinoviev. Though only briefly active in the Trotskyist movement, his home played host to the founding conference of the Fourth International in 1938, and he also took part in the Dewey commission into the allegations against Leon Trotsky.

The majority of intellectuals approached to participate in the commission of inquiry into the Moscow trials refused. In the face of the fascist peril, some claimed that this was not the moment to howl with the wolves. You had to choose your camp, even if it was that of Kolyma and Vorkuta. Eminent historians took refuge in a subtle argument, claiming it was impossible to prove that something did not exist. If the Left Opposition was innocent of the crimes that it was accused of in Moscow, it would be impossible to supply the proof of negative facts. What then was the use of a commission? Sophism, cowardice, evasion; the regular dishonour of intellectual 'friends of the Soviet Union' and complacent fellow travellers.

John Dewey is all the more deserving of credit for accepting to chair the commission, and travelling to Mexico to hold hearings (Trotsky being unable to enter the United States). The philosopher was then approaching eighty. He was a liberal in the higher sense of the term, and moreover a theorist of both judicial and historical investigation and its methods. And so he did not view his mission in a complacent light. The rules of procedure were strict: not to believe *a priori* either Mr Stalin or Mr Trotsky. But how could the investigation itself be the source of the rules that it was to follow? In history as in law, immanent logic is an exacting discipline. In any judgement, it is impossible to avoid the uncertainty of the verdict mirroring that of the facts.

Despite difficulties and scruples, Dewey agreed to chair the commission. Refusing it would have meant 'missing the work of my whole life'. The truth is that he felt a keen interest in this man who had presided over the soviets, negotiated at Brest-Litovsk, written the manifestos of the Communist International. He was impelled by an intellectual curiosity towards a man whom he could only describe on meeting him as destitute, surrounded by a handful of faithful followers, at the head of dwarf parties and a minuscule International: 'There is in him something unaccomplished, which misfortune adds to virtue.'

Arriving in Mexico with the delegation from the commission, Dewey took care not to meet Trotsky before the public hearings, and guarded against being won over by sympathy. The commission's fourteen sessions were held in the blue house from 10 to 17 April 1937, two each day. Empty today and transformed into a museum, where all that remains are easels, unfinished canvases and orphaned plants, the rooms seem still to echo with depositions and

interrogations from the time that one of the great tragedies of the century was performed, in a classical unity of time and space, before some forty individuals.⁹

The first sessions focused on biographies, and particularly the relationships between Trotsky and Lenin. The two following were spent on Trotsky's connections with the accused in the Moscow trials. Three others on refuting the factual allegations made there. Six on the alleged sabotage of the Soviet economy. The final session heard the pleas of Albert Goldman and Trotsky himself:

Humanity has not managed up to now to rationalise its history. That is a fact. Neither have we managed to rationalise our bodies and our minds. Psychoanalysis tries to teach us to bring them into harmony – without great success, so far. The question is not to know whether we can attain an absolutely perfect society. After each great step forward, humanity makes a detour, or even a great step backward. But I am not responsible for that.

In his speech, the Old Man envisaged, not without humour, that after the world revolution humanity might feel as tired as God did on the evening of the sixth day, or even that a new religion might appear. All the same, he added, a great step would still have been taken.

His deposition was not obsessed by the personality of Stalin. The real question was rather to know how 'the most eminent mediocrity in the Party' had been able to rise to the summit of power thanks to an impersonal machine, being its creature rather than its creator. And by what circumstances this mediocrity had been able to play such a disproportionate role in history.

For several hours, Trotsky submitted to questions, methodically dismantling the macabre constructions of the trials, patiently arguing in a language that was not his own. The jurors were impressed by this monument of logic. For him, it was his most important battle. More important, perhaps, than that of October. More than the epic of the Red Army. When history advances in the right direction, it always finds the men and women it needs: 'October would have taken place without me, perhaps without Lenin.' When the winds become contrary, on the other hand, the men that are needed are scarce. It is in defeat that one sometimes becomes irreplaceable.

What was important, therefore, in this trial behind closed doors in the blue house, was to unmask the imposture before myth devoured

memory. Otherwise, the revolution could remain confused forever with the counter-revolution, the executioners with the victims, Communism with a Stalinism that was its negation. Before a handful of men and women of good will, the history of the century paraded in the fragrant mornings of the blue house. The stake was no less than the possibility of continuing and beginning again, a stake both derisory and decisive at the same time.

Dewey was persuaded that the Moscow trials were an imposture. He remained convinced, on the other hand, that the totalitarian regime that organised them was the natural result and logical consequence of the revolution. Trotsky was certainly prepared to acknowledge his mistakes, but he stood firm on the rupture of continuity involved in the Thermidorean reaction and the bureaucratic counter-revolution, attested to by millions of dead. The state and its bureaucracy of parvenus had devoured the party of October. A new era brought with it new adventurers and a new political immorality. Despite the advance in knowledge and technique, manners had scarcely progressed since the Florence of Lorenzaccio and the Borgias: the era remained a gigantic lie factory. Perhaps this was the lot of times of crisis and transition, in which one morality breaks down before a new one can take root: 'Nero too was a product of his time.' The prophet disarmed, the exile of Coyoacán, consoled himself with the idea that the logic of history would be more powerful than the most powerful general secretary.

Engels himself had warned, once and for all, that 'History does nothing.' So is it as logical as we would like to believe? Strong enough to overcome the confession that makes the innocent doubt their innocence, and impels them to consent to their own punishment?

At the end of the hearings, Dewey confided to Trotsky that this had been the most interesting intellectual experience of his life. Although fascinated by the tragedy of an individual, he criticised Trotsky for 'a brilliant intelligence enclosed in absolutes'. The philosopher remained convinced that Stalinism was the consequence of Communism; Trotsky insisted on the novelty of the Stalin phenomenon. In relation to the totalitarian bureaucratic state, the old absolutist formula – '*l'État, c'est moi*' – now seemed like a liberal maxim. Stalin's formula was rather '*La société, c'est moi*'.¹⁰

The dialogue between Trotsky and Dewey on the relationship between morality and politics provided the material, a year later, for Trotsky's pamphlet *Their Morals and Ours*, often mentioned, but little

read and generally misunderstood. Most hasty commentators see this as a handbook of political immoralism, guided by the sole maxim that the end justifies the means. This reading is completely perverse. On this point, Trotsky's article is clear:

Let us admit for the moment that neither personal nor social ends can justify the means. Then it is evidently necessary to seek criteria outside of historical society and those ends which arise in its development. But where? If not on earth, then in the heavens . . . The theory of eternal morals can in no wise survive without god . . . Jesuit theologians . . . actually taught that the means in itself can be a matter of indifference but that the moral justification or judgement of the given means flowed from the end . . . the Jesuits were not at all worse than other monks or Catholic priests, on the contrary, they were superior to them . . . The warriors of the church became its bureaucrats, and like all bureaucrats, passable swindlers.

According to the utilitarian morality of John Stuart Mill, the end of common good morally justifies the means. In the same way, for the contemporary champions of 'ethical' or 'humanitarian' warfare, the purity of intentions (defence of human rights, humanitarian intervention . . .) ends up justifying the most doubtful means, and the ethical ideal the worst of armed terrors.

Trotsky asks, on the contrary, what is it that justifies the end? And who is the judge? Morality does not descend from heaven onto societies torn apart by social struggles and conflicts. The means can only be justified by the end, 'but the end also has need of justification'. The fault lies in the question right from the start. By separating end and means, bourgeois moralising ends up in a logical blind alley.

Dewey understood Trotsky's argument perfectly well. He did not confuse it with a vulgar utilitarianism, still less a cynical politics, and he shared its point of departure: the interdependence of ends and means. Not all means, therefore, were legitimate. If there was no other criterion, as Trotsky maintained, than the development of consciousness and culture – what will liberate a humanity that is truly human – then not all means were permissible, even for an atheist and a revolutionary. When, in the belief that by historicising moral judgement and dislodging any risk of abstract transcendence, Trotsky made the class struggle 'the law of all laws', did he not transform a means into an end, despite himself?¹¹ As distinct from most superfi-

cial polemics, this controversy was at a high level. It was unfortunately broken off before Trotsky was able to continue, as he had indicated was his intention.

On 14 December 1937, the Dewey commission made public the results of its work, at a press conference in New York. These were published in a thick volume of six hundred pages, the result of three hundred days of titanic work. The conclusion: 'We find the Moscow Trials to be frame-ups. We therefore declare Trotsky and Sedov to be not guilty.'

'Two lines!', Trotsky exclaimed when he received the news. 'But two lines that will weigh heavy in the library of humanity.'

During the week in which it hosted the hearings of the Dewey commission, the blue house became a hive of activity. Files piled up on the tables. Stenographers copied out minutes of the depositions. The lawyers strolled in the garden, exchanging comments against a background of birdsong. In this minuscule Eden transformed into a courtroom, the mystique of a historic event merged with that of the amorous encounter between Leon and Frida.

The idyll was short-lived. The Old Man was approaching sixty. For him, emotional crisis supervened on political crisis. He was exhausted by the effort necessary for him to present a solidly documented case. Intellectual tension was accompanied by a sudden erotic charge.

After the fatigue of the hearings and the emotions of a short love affair, he felt the need to take a clear look, to draw up a balance sheet, to know where he was in his life. In July 1937, he retired to the farm of a friend in San Miguel de Reglas. The man who has left a rather aristocratic image, inspecting troops in an impeccable uniform, giving orders from an armoured train, haranguing the Petrograd soviet, fell victim to disarray and emotional disorder.

Almost every day he wrote to Natalia, who remained in Coyoacán.

On 12 July: 'There you are, I saw in my imagination you coming to see me with the sentiments of youth. We pressed against one another, we joined our lips, our souls and our bodies. My writing is distorted by tears, Natalotchka, but can there be anything more elevated than these tears? All the same, I shall take myself in hand . . .' As if to exorcise his own sense of guilt, he took the initiative like an adolescent in the wrong, staging for Natalia his retrospective jealousy, accusing her of hypothetical unfaithfulness in the distant days of the civil war, while he was off at the front.

19 July, 13:00: 'Since I arrived here, my poor cock has not stiffened once. As if it didn't exist. It's also resting from the efforts of these past days. But I am always thinking of your darling old cunt. I want to suck it, to stick my tongue into it, into its very depth. Natalotchka darling, I shall penetrate you again very forcefully, with my tongue and with my cock. Pardon me for these lines, Natalotchka; I believe this is the first time in my life that I'm writing like this.'

19 July, still, 20:00: 'Every human being is terribly alone at bottom, you write, Natalotchka, my poor love, my old friend! My darling, my beloved. But you don't have only solitude. We still live for one another, don't we? I have to work. I cover your eyes, your hands, your feet with kisses. Your old Leon.'

In the course of this crisis, he resolved to break with Frida. People often have the illusion that they can leave their past behind. It always ends up catching you treacherously on the turn. It is always a length or two in advance, the past. It appears before you like a grinning ape. For Leon, as for Natalia, this past was heavily charged. More spectres. Not facetious and light-hearted, like René Clair's 'phantoms for sale', haunting the ruins of a Scottish castle. But painful spectres. Those of dear ones, first of all. Their daughter Zina, who committed suicide in Berlin, their son-in-law Platon Volkov, their son Sergei who disappeared into the camps, their son and companion, Lev Sedov, dead in Paris in 1938 in suspicious circumstances. Then those who killed themselves under the Soviet Thermidor: Abraham Joffe, Yesenin, Mayakovsky – and the many others that followed.* Finally, those of murdered comrades: Rudolf Klement, whose body was thrown in pieces into the Seine; Erwin Wolf, liquidated in Spain; Ignaz Reiss, murdered on a Swiss road; Andreu Nin, disappeared in the GPU cellars of Alcalá de Henares.† And most recently, Christian

* Adolf Joffe, 1883–1927, joined the Russian Social Democratic and Labour Party as a high-school student in Crimea. Expelled from the country having participated in the 1905 revolution, he was a member of the exile bureau of the RSDLP and worked on Trotsky's *Pravda*. Re-entering Russia secretly, he was again arrested and deported. In 1917 he was active in the Inter-District Organisation and the Moscow municipal council. A diplomat engaged in many missions including the Brest-Litovsk negotiations. Having joined the Left Opposition, and gravely ill, he was forced into retirement and then committed suicide.

† Rudolf Klement, 1908–38, originally a member of the German Communist Party, joined the Left Opposition in 1932. Went to Prinkipo to join Trotsky in 1933. Consistently sided with Trotsky in factional disputes, and became organisational secretary of the Fourth International, including working on the preparation of its founding conference. Victim of a gruesome murder by the NKVD in 1938, his headless and legless corpse was pulled out of the River Seine on 26 July, and his legs two days later.

Rakovsky, the last link with the older generation.' After him, there was no one else . . .

Just a great and terrible solitude. And the immense fatigue that Moses already felt on the threshold of Canaan.

Arriving at Tampico, Trotsky had tried to believe in a new chance, a new dealing of the cards. At fifty-eight years old, the mirage of a new world awaited him. That was an illusion. A dream in blue that turned to nightmare: 'That night, I dreamed I was travelling with Lenin. It was on the bridge of a ship. He was lying on a stretcher. He asked me kindly about my illness. I am trying to wear down my illness . . .' Lassitude lamed him, but he knew that he still needed some years of stubborn work in order to put his legacy in order and render his testimony.

What had attracted him to Frida, besides her fragile strength, was perhaps the shared feeling of being wounded, the wound of history finding an echo in the wound of the body; it was having discovered, through her painting, a great interpreter of pain. That again was an illusion. An improbable dialogue between two masks. A failed meeting between two cultures, two histories, two loyalties, incapable of uniting. The prophet disarmed counted for nothing against the incestuous and sacred complicity of Diego and Frida, against their shared androgyny. He was incapable of untying the intertwined vices and virtues of their dark Mexico.

Always in agony, but 'laughing to the point of tears', Frida stumbled like the devil with a cleft foot. He knew that he could not follow such a devil. His life could no more detach itself from the history he had made and that had made him. Natalia was part of that history, Frida was not. He ended up therefore asking her to give back his

Erwin Wolf, 1902–37(?), born to a Czech-Jewish family, a Left Oppositionist and secretary to Leon Trotsky. Arrested in Barcelona in July 1937 following the May Days, in which there was open warfare between the Stalinists and the anarchists and POUM. Then disappeared, either killed in a Catalan jail or in the USSR.

Ignace Reiss, 1899–1937, a Polish Communist who worked for the information service of the Red Army. He played an important role sending the first weapons to Spain. After the second Moscow Trial he announced that he was defecting from Stalin to join the Fourth International, and a few weeks later he was murdered by the NKVD near Lausanne.

* Christian Rakovsky, 1873–1941, a Bulgarian, a leader of the Romanian Socialists and organiser of the Zimmerwald anti-war congress. A friend of Trotsky, and head of the Ukrainian government during the post-revolution civil war. A diplomat for the Bolshevik government. Returning to Russia in 1927, he was sent into Siberian exile as a Left Oppositionist. He surrendered to Stalin and 'admitted his mistakes', but after a brief period of rehabilitation was the subject of a show trial, and executed by the NKVD.

letters, which she did. He destroyed them. In this way he erased the traces of that ephemeral passion, that twilight flame with no future. In the guise of a farewell present, she gave him a self-portrait dedicated 'With all my love'.

Frida divorced Diego in 1939, only to remarry him a year later.

In the blue house, it was now Stalin's portrait that stood by her bedside. Revenge? Conversion? In the name of anti-fascism? Of the fracture between the barbaric East and the decaying West? A response to the demand to choose one's camp? Or again, the disturbing influence of Tina Modotti, the lost and rediscovered friend?

After the assassination of the Old Man, Frida was questioned, suspected as Tina had been after the death of Mella. She declared that his death was 'all of our faults'. She also acknowledged that she had soon tired of him, this piece of history that had landed at Tampico like the legendary white saviour of Aztec legend. Too disciplined, too rational, too authoritarian for this country. Not sensual enough. Too European, certainly. She had never been a Trotskyist. She simply supported Diego's political choices and battles. Always Diego. But why this celebration of Stalin, after such a journey. Because she had seen 'Gringolandia', and returned from it? Because she had seen that 'Paris *pinche*', that old Europe, which never stopped turning out new Hitlers and new Mussolinis? Hope was rising now in the east, in Russia and China.

Inspired by a belated need to believe in miracles, to believe that a thaumaturgic Marxism might heal the sick, the world, and her own leg, after the War her paintings were like *ex votos*. After twenty-two years of operations and the amputation, she was nothing more than a torment to be carried round and exhibited.

All that flayed suffering. And all the invisible red in the deceptive calm of the blue house.

How many phantoms haunt that magic house! A year after the Dewey commission, ten months after his break with Frida, Leon was preparing to welcome André Breton by reading *L'Amour fou*. His entourage was thinning out. The solitude was deepening. Since May 1937, the news from Spain left very little room for hope. In Moscow, trials and confessions continued. And then Munich confirmed the path to war. Like the Trojan war, it would end up taking place.

In 1938, speaking at the Palacio de Bellas Artes, Breton was booed by Stalinist provocateurs and defended by Rivera. The encounter between the poet and the reclusive revolutionary was not

immediately warm. For Trotsky, novels were daily bread. Breton saw only banalities and trivialities, in which the marvellous was corrupted. Trotsky appreciated in Céline a prose that did justice to reality, while Breton only saw the stain of a pen dipped in mud. Trotsky praised the realism of Maupassant and Zola. Breton conceded, reluctantly and without conviction, that traces of poetry could be found in Zola if one looked hard.

A man of the Enlightenment lost in the middle of a dark century, Trotsky wondered whether, contrary to Freud, the Surrealists were not seeking to deny the conscious in favour of the unconscious. He was amazed by their taste for 'objective chance', suspecting them of seeking to open 'a little window on the beyond'. You write, he reproached Breton, that these contingent phenomena have a disturbing character for you. Disturbing in the present state of our knowledge, the poet defended himself. 'Ah, if you spell this out, I withdraw my objection.'

In July 1938, during a stay in Pátzcuaro, Breton surprised Trotsky stroking a dog's back: 'At least dogs are loyal and devoted.' Breton railed at such clichés. Between the poet and the revolutionary, the temptation of the marvellous and mysterious then seemed to change sides: how could one be led to ascribe to animals human goodness! The next thing would be to say that the mosquito is deliberately cruel and the shrimp deliberately shy . . . 'But you're wrong,' the Old Man stuck to his guns, a little provocatively: 'this dog does feel friendship for me.' He had such a need for it.

The very presence of Trotsky inoculated Breton. By his own admission, it deprived him of his resources and gave him a curious desire to disappear, to hide himself, as if he was confronted by one of those men – Rimbaud or Lautréamont – on whom he sought to model his sensibility and his thought. Trotsky remained in his eyes, along with Freud, the only living representative of that species. When he finally submitted to him his draft *Manifesto for an Independent Revolutionary Art*, the Old Man paused on the sentence claiming 'every licence in art, except against the proletarian revolution'. 'You are too zealous, Breton. Cut out the end of that sentence. "Every license in art", full stop. Fifteen years ago, I would perhaps have written the same as you.' He certainly would . . . All the more so during the civil war, when, writing *Terrorism and Communism* amid the torment, he dangerously confused the exception and the rule.

But this last year, in the blue house, he had experienced the test, always begun anew, of amorous disorder, of human weakness, of the painful work of grieving. He had been able to verify once again that sentiments decidedly do not march at the same rhythm as decrees and orders: that manners, mentalities and emotions follow a different temporality from economics and politics. Economics needs a plan, he concluded, but for intellectual creation 'the revolution must establish from the beginning an anarchist regime of individual liberty. Yes, anarchist! No authority, no constraint, not the slightest trace of command!'

Silone, Giono, and of course Péret, signed Breton's *Manifesto*. Gide did not, neither did Bachelard or Martin du Gard.

Le gusta este jardín? Evite que sus hijos le destruyan. If you like this garden, make sure that your children don't destroy it.

1938. The same year in which Trotsky, Breton, Rivera, Frida, Natalia, Jacqueline and Van Heijenoort were talking on the patio of the blue house, Malcolm Lowry's consul was wandering in Quauhnahuac, in another garden overgrown with rank plants, beneath the masculine bulk of the volcano and the sleeping woman lying like an odalisque at his side. Volcanos? 'How sentimental one can become towards them,' Lowry writes ironically.

From one garden to another: the garden of Eden to the Kelipot of the Kabbalists, a world of scales, shells and demons. In Quauhnahuac, in 1986, we walked down the calle Nicaragua in the steps of a phantom consul staggering under the effects of mescal. We visited the *cantinas*, Lowry's house (which we were told was soon to be demolished), raised our eyes to the volcano, and drank a glass at the Casino de la Selva as night was falling. We followed the fatal road to Tomalin. We left for Oaxaca, where the crazed couple knew happiness and separation, at the foot of the ruins of Monte Alban where threatening clouds loomed.

Can one live without love? And can one love in a world without gods?¹² In Lowry's novel, the three characters in search of love cling together only to lose themselves the more. The consul is consumed by impotent guilt while 'they're losing the battle of the Ebro' and republican Spain is in its death throes. The echo of that lost battle resounds like a reproach. It accompanies like a background noise the last journey of his fatal meeting with Yvonne.

They are losing the battle. They? We?

The story of the century is unfolding, in the agony of republican Spain.

End of the journey.

'Old endgame lost of old, play and lose and have done with losing.'¹³

Yvonne dies alone, struck down and trampled by the horse of the rider of the *ejidal*, marked on the flank with the number 7, the fateful number of chance and mischance. On a day of mystic rain in Osasco, in the suburbs of São Paulo, I came across a similar horse, the same perhaps, maddened by lightning, whinnying with fear, huddled against a low wall while a torrent was carrying away the red dirt road.

Geoffrey dies alone, surrounded by refuse, shot like a dog by Mexican fascists who call him a 'Bolshevik cunt', a Jew, an agent of the International Brigades, an *escopion*. They call him 'Trotsky' in derision, on account of his beard and a vague resemblance. He agonises there, while the battle of the Ebro is being lost. And his wretched death echoes the murder being prepared in the calle Viena.

We returned to the blue house in September 1986, with its desolate tomb and its machine-gunned walls, in the company of our moon-struck guide. We walked from avenida Londres to calle Viena, from the paradise garden to the prison courtyard overgrown with weeds. A few weeks before, Jean Van Heijenoort, the Old Man's young secretary and bodyguard in the 1930s, had returned only to be killed in the town he had left in order to distance himself from Leon and Frida and return to his passion for mathematical logic.

Van Heijenoort: a revenant who had returned to join, half a century later, the circle of spectres of the blue house. The secret young lover of Frida, he left in time, in 1939, to devote himself to the study of Bertrand Russell, Frege and Gödel. The last survivor of the blue house's guardian angels, he returned in 1986, impelled by an 'objective chance', to be murdered by his fourth wife, Ana Maria Zamora. The day before Easter, his father-in-law, Adolfo Zamora, formerly the lawyer of both Rivera and Trotsky, had called him from the United States where he now lived, begging him to come urgently as Ana was threatening to kill herself. Van Heijenoort took the threat seriously. He knew she was depressed, and had a gun. 'Of course, she wants to kill me too,' he admitted, before leaving his American friends. Yet he faithfully kept this final rendezvous. On Easter Saturday 1986, Trotsky's former secretary was shot in his sleep with three bullets. His former partner killed herself with a fourth bullet in the mouth.¹⁴

'This is what we call making an exit.'¹⁵

Lowry's Mexico was a kind of hellish paradise, or a paradisiacal hell. His book sought to be 'a prophecy, a political warning',¹⁶ an echo of the old Indian prophecies. The twentieth century in Mexico began with a great peasant insurrection that revealed the hidden barbarism behind the Positivist dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, just as the Canudos commune revealed the cruelty of more recent crusades, and the 'populicide' in the Vendée revealed to the eyes of Babeuf the ferocity of which the new order was capable.

From Canodus to the Christiade, the downbeat of history is rhythmised by ambivalent popular revolts. Almost a century later, the neo-Zapatista uprising of 1 January 1994 launched a new challenge, to the brutal modernisation of the great American market. After his long march to Mexico City, sub-commander Marcos returned to the mountains of Chiapas – as Zapata, after sitting in the presidential chair, had returned to the hills of Morelos.

This detour by way of popular heresies, Brazilian and Mexican, helped me understand the breaks and fractures of historical time, and to question the illusions of progress as a one-way street.

Whirlwinds

Commercialism triumphs, egoism thrives, and the best men are forced to grieve. It's the counter-revolution. What reigns now is a terror of the *juste milieu*.

— Heinrich Heine

In some sense, it's the future of the past that is in question.

— Paul Valéry

In January 1990, we held the first meeting of our Latin American sections since the events in East Germany. Already, hopes of a renaissance of a democratic socialism in Eastern Europe seemed dashed. The fall of the Berlin Wall had contradictory effects, to say the least. This was particularly clear when seen from Latin America. In one intervention, I suggested that the rupture of the catastrophic balance of Yalta might be the prelude to a return of wars in a Europe that had known, as is too often forgotten, the most violent deaths per square metre in the course of the last two centuries. Astonished by this gloomy prophecy, a Mexican comrade asked: '*Los Balcanos?*'

Yes, the Balkans.¹

Aside from internationalist peregrinations, my time during the 1980s was divided between the university of Saint-Denis, the monthly publication *Inprecor*, and the leadership of the International, whose headquarters had recently returned from Brussels, after the Mauroy government lifted the bans on various individuals visiting that had been imposed in 1968.

Our bonsai Comintern's modest premises were in a building on the rue Godefroy-Cavaignac. The cosmopolitan team was a cross between Brancaloneone's army and Les Pieds Nickelés.* John Ross, subsequently an adviser to Ken Livingstone at the GLC, was a pink and chubby-

* A popular comic series starring a group of down-and-outs who try their luck at various crooked activities.

faced Englishman out of a Dickens novel: a learned music lover, and specialist in the sexuality of mice, he would sometimes stroll along with a Lanquetot camembert reeking in his jacket pocket.* Tom Gustafsson, an enthusiastic Swedish giant, avidly consulted his dictionary to follow discussions in French.† Livio Maitan, an Italian exiled in Paris, fervently supported the Paris-Saint-Germain football team of Dominique Rocheteau. Ernest Mandel and Charles-André Udry rivalled one another in knowledge, arguing with statistics drawn from the *Financial Times* or *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*. Manuel Aguila Mora, a Mexican cinephile, impatiently awaited the end of meetings to rush off to see *La Dernière Femme* (during the scene when Depardieu mutilates himself, he stood up and called for his mother!).‡ Gerry Foley, an Irish-American, read and spoke some fifty languages, which he learned by the bunch; he had converted his room into a kind of igloo, exclusively wallpapered with dictionaries.§ When Ernest launched out on a cascade of historical analogies to drown the fish of the present, Miguel Romero, 'El Moro', simply threatened to leave the room. Sakai the Japanese expressed himself sparsely in a summary English, breaking out in enigmatic laughs and equally sudden fits of anger, punctuated by ideograms out of *The Blue Lotus*.¶ Laconic New Zealanders and Australians sometimes expanded this circle.²

This little picturesque world was backed up by the arrival of Zbigniew Kowalewski, surprised on a visit to France by General Jaruleski's coup d'état of December 1981, and the Turkish-Armenian Masis, who rarely ate his fill.** Zbigniew produced an underground *Inprecor* in Polish,

* John Ross (born 1938) leading member of the International Marxist Group, member of the United Secretariat of the FI, university professor, journalist.

† Tom Gustafsson (1947–87), member of the League of Revolutionary Socialists (later Socialist Party) Swedish section of the FI. Member of the Executive Bureau of the FI.

‡ Manuel Aguilar Mora, leading member of the Mexican PRT, then of the Liga de Unidad Socialista Member of United Secretariat of the FI, director the journal *Umbra*.

§ Gerry Foley (1939–2012), member of the SWP (USA) and then Socialist Action (USA). Journalist, member of the Executive Bureau of the FI.

¶ Yohichi Sakai (1937). Attended Kyoto University in 1956. member of the Japanese FI group from 1959 to the 1990s. FI-IEC member in the 1970s and 1980s, and FI-bureau member at Paris in 1980–81. General editor of the Japanese 'Writings of Leon Trotsky' from the mid-1970s to the early 1990s.

** Zbigniew Kowalewski, born 1943, active with the MIR in Cuban exile. In 1981, elected to the Solidarnosc Executive Committee for the Lodz region. Then in exile in France. A campaign against his expulsion was waged by the FI, though he did not belong to that organisation publicly at the time. Concerned himself with political and trade union publications, including organising the Polish edition of *Le Monde Diplomatique*. A member of the Polish Party of Labour.

together with Cyril Smulga, while Masis sent miniaturised subversive satires back to Turkey.*

Despite the possibility of ridicule, and the megalomaniac tendency to embrace the dialectic of the world revolution, this mini Babel was an excellent school of languages, method, writing and collective work.

Ernest Mandel was more of a *metter-à-penser* than a *maître-penseur* for us, a tutor in theory and a passer between two generations. We learned a great deal from him, without his ever becoming a kind of authoritarian guru in the manner of Michel Pablo, Juan Posadas, Pierre Lambert or Tony Cliff. The term 'Mandelism', coined by his opponents, never gained currency. As a young Trotskyist militant in Belgium, influenced by Abraham Léon³ and deported at the age of seventeen, Ernest set out during the 1950s to conceptualise the new features of the era, instead of piously watching over the political legacy of the past. From the *Treatise on Marxist Economics* (early 1960s) to *Late Capitalism* (published in 1977) and *Long Waves* (1980), he sought to elucidate the contemporary mysteries of capitalist accumulation, which had shown a new dynamism after being moribund in the interwar years. This daily contact with Ernest was a wellspring of knowledge and a permanent initiation into the foundations of Marxism.

Mandel was sufficiently polyglot to write equally in German, English or French. He also spoke a curious pidgin Spanish sprinkled with Italianisms. But he claimed to dream always in Flemish, his mother tongue. His influence and prestige were manifest in Germany, Latin America, and the English-speaking world. Perry Anderson, the touchy editor of *New Left Review*, saw him as a privileged interlocutor.⁴ Despite the success of his books in paperback editions, he was less well known in France. Yet he demonstrated a multidisciplinary culture far superior to so many mediocre mandarins with an ephemeral reputation. Not sophisticated enough? Too Belgian? Certainly too foreign to the world of academy and media, with its autarchic self-sufficiency and its frivolity. Additional handicaps were that he was categorised as an economist and his formation was solidly

Masis Kürkçigil, one of the founders of the Turkish new left in the 1960s. Member of the leadership of *Sosyalist demokrasi için Yeni Yol* (Turkish section of the FI).

* Cyril Smulga (aka Jean Malewski), born 1957, of Polish origin, from 1973 an LCR activist. A member of the bureau of the FI and of the NPA. Editor of *Inprecor* as well as the clandestine Polish edition under the Jaruzelski military regime.

Germanic – two characteristics not readily compatible with the lightness of spirit typical of France.

When I worked alongside him, he inspired in me more in the way of respect than affection. Like Proust's Françoise, he often seemed more generous towards distant humanity than attentive to those closest at hand. Dialogue with him was not easy. Either he administered his interlocutor a lesson in monologue form, or subjected them to a tight questioning, seeking to glean information suited to confirming his own opinion. The relationship was rarely reciprocal and egalitarian. Except with Udry, whom he rightly treated as an alter ego and designated heir.

A man of the Enlightenment, confident in the liberating virtues of the productive forces, the emancipating powers of science and the historical logic of progress, he was intelligent enough to take ecological concerns on board at an early date. As well as detective stories and stamp collecting, animal albums were another of his hobbies. Ernest was an exemplary case of stubborn optimism of the will tempered by an intermittent pessimism of reason: for him, permanent revolution would win the day over permanent catastrophe. And the socialist prophecy would (almost) always defeat barbarism.

He wielded with virtuosity a historical dialectic tinged with positivism and sociological objectivism. Such a dialectic, too formal for my taste, tended to end up as rhetorical trickery, a machine to spirit away the political difficulties of the present conjuncture into the sense of universal history. Faced with events that fitted badly into preconceived schemas (the Nicaraguan revolution or the war in Afghanistan), Ernest evaded the difficulty by invoking various historical antecedents and taking various theoretical precautions, without pronouncing on the question at hand. This rift between theory and practice was undoubtedly the result of a life of militancy too long in a minority and confined to the margins. In short, he had – in due proportions – weaknesses comparable to those for which Adolf Joffe affectionately reproached Trotsky, in the farewell letter written on the eve of his suicide in 1927.⁵

And yet Ernest was no ethereal intellectual. He fully assumed, with self-denial, his share of everyday tasks. He devoted much valuable time and energy to useless correspondence with insignificant interlocutors, to derisory polemics, or to seeking financial support! Behind the good-natured Belgian façade, he was also capable of epic rage that shook the walls.

Charles-André Udry was unquestionably the closest to him, without there being between them a relationship of master to disciple, rather a kind of emulation in the race for knowledge. This affinity was not the result of chance. Both were cultural mestizos, Germanist Francophones, permeated with the classical culture of the German workers' movement. Charles-André, of a later generation, was more inclined to action, endowed with a better political sense and a strong practical creativity. It was certainly from him that I learned most. Outwardly rough to the point of sometimes seeming brutal, he (badly) repressed a delicate sensibility, an attention to others and a supportive generosity. Almost pathologically perfectionist, he produced far less than he was capable of doing. Despite a seemingly peremptory self-assurance, he was gripped by the anxiety of not having done well enough, a devouring need to seduce and receive reassuring approval in return. We spent nights together polishing, word by word, texts that immediately fell into oblivion. I sometimes took notes on his presentations and worked them up, knowing that he would never do so himself, on the pretext of indefinitely enriching and improving his argument. This excessive demand ended up becoming an involuntary elitism, depriving militants of material that was certainly imperfect but no less useful for all that.

Ernest and Charles-André were perhaps both characters oversized in relation to their respective countries of origin. Having become footloose preachers of world revolution, they failed to find a field of action to match their capacities. Under their impulse, we opened in 1983 an International Institute of Research and Education, established in Amsterdam on Willemsparksweg backing on to the Wondelpark and close to the Van Gogh museum. Twice-yearly courses of three months were held there, alternately in English and Spanish. The first English-speaking session took place in autumn 1983. The spring sessions were mainly designed for Latin American comrades. These prolonged stays brought together disparate groups. They gave the opportunity for militants of both sexes, too caught up in everyday activism, to take a distance, read, reflect collectively and form cosmopolitan friendships (even love affairs). The operation was under the wing of Pierre Rousset and his Filipina partner Sally. For some ten years, they watched over the premises, as directors of studies, economic managers, and confidants and confessors if need be.

Latinos, Africans, Thais, Filipinos and Dominicans were equally surprised to discover the peaceful serenity of the canals, the treasures

of the museums, the quiet cycle rides along the Amstel. They were confirmed in the idea that bourgeoisified Europe would no longer be the continent of revolutions: at best, a great economic and cultural rear base, with its NGOs and institutes. The moments of relaxation were spent jogging in the Wondelpark, organising intercontinental (and mixed) football matches, and browsing for second-hand books at Van Gennepe's. The English-speaking Brazilians who came to attend the autumn session, wrapped in crumpled overcoats, resembled the picture of Caetano Veloso numb with cold, shrouded in a fur coat, on the eponymous LP recorded during his British exile.

Around 1988, the winds of history began to blow more strongly once more. In Mexico, the contested electoral victory of Salinas de Gortari heralded the recolonisation of the country and the beginning of a chronic political crisis. In September, less than two months after the July election and the mobilisations against the electoral fraud, we held a meeting close to an enchanting hacienda right out of the legend of the 1911 revolution. Sergio Rodriguez understood the significance of the turn. During morning walks in the company of El Moro, before a copious breakfast of *frijoles* and *huevos rancheros*, he forecast that the frustration generated by the fraud⁶ would trigger foci of armed struggle. Less than six years later, the neo-Zapatista insurrection of 1 January 1994 would confirm his predictions.

In 1989, however, worn out by ten years of civil war imposed by the *contra* with the backing of the United States and undermined by corruption, the Sandinistas lost the elections. This defeat was perhaps better for future prospects than holding on to power at any price by force of arms. Exhausted and isolated, the Salvadorian *guerrilleros* were led to negotiate a shaky peace that sanctioned a strategic impasse. In Brazil, Lula narrowly failed in his first presidential bid.

In hindsight, the coincidence between these dates often seems eloquent. In the course of the same year of 1989, the Cuban general Arnaldo Ochoa and Tony de la Guardia were shot after a caricature of a trial. I had visited Cuba with Sophie in 1983, on the thirtieth anniversary of the attack on the Moncada barracks. Like most visitors, we were seduced by the country, by its history and the welcome of its people, and we could feel the still warm breath of the revolution. If the Castro regime was incontestably authoritarian and bureaucratic, it maintained a wide popular legitimacy, despite the years of the US blockade and pressure. Cuba was not some kind of tropical Romania or Bulgaria, nor was Fidel, despite his fits of senile

megalomania, a clone of Honecker or Ceaușescu. Twenty years later, the island still enjoys among the Latin American left a prestige not exempt from criticism. It exerts an attraction that the bureaucratic dictatorships of Eastern Europe never did on Western Europe. After all, it is not the fault of the Cuban people if the international socialist movement has been unable in more than forty years to break its isolation, or even impose a lifting of the blockade. The rest – the shortages, the queues, the *libreta*,⁷ *the rationing and the privileges – all follows. Which does not make the repressive methods, the explicit or implicit censorship and the bureaucratic caudillismo, any less intolerable.*

It is a crushing experience to read the transcript of the Ochoa-La Guardia trial, published officially in Cuba, likewise the evidence of Ileana de la Guardia (Tony's daughter) and her partner Jorge Masetti, or Comandante Benigno, Che's companion in Bolivia.⁸ The degeneration of a revolution is not a linear process. It proceeds a step at a time. Joseph de Maistre, who knew what he was talking about, said that a counter-revolution is not a revolution in the opposite direction, but rather 'the opposite of a revolution'. There is no symmetry between the revolutionary event and its negation. The Ochoa trial was confirmation of a preceding political and moral decomposition. Without renouncing solidarity with Cuba in the face of imperialist threats and blockade, we should not for all that fall back into the mistake of the 'friends of the Soviet Union' who kept silent in the face of the Moscow trials, on the cowardly pretext of not howling with the wolves. Coming from militants with a record of solidarity, condemnation of this gloomy bureaucratic affair was more faithful to the spirit of Guevara and the revolution than a complicit silence.

Along with Gilles Perrault and an old Spanish libertarian comrade, we visited the Cuban embassy to hand in a petition demanding the release of Patricio de la Guardia, Tony's twin brother, who had been imprisoned for the sole (official) reason of not having denounced his brother.* Escorted to the internal phone by an orderly, we were asked to wait until the ambassador was free. Once informed of our intrusion, he condescended to send us his chauffeur with an order to

* Gilles Perrault, born 1931. A lawyer and subsequently a journalist, he made his name with numerous books, including *The Red Orchestra* (1967) and *Notre Ami le Roi* (1990), in which he denounced Hassan II, king of Morocco, who used torture against his opponents. Concerned by the rise of the Front National, he was very active in the creation of the anti-fascist Ras l'Front in the 1990s.

categorically refuse to receive the text that we sought to deliver. The occasion prompted Gilles to resort to his legal training. He solemnly placed our document on a table, declaring that it would thereby remain on Cuban territory.

As Deleuze wrote, it was a time when 'possibilities were being closed'.

In autumn 1989, the Berlin Wall fell in a great historic fracas. Champagne and Alka-Seltzer! Champagne, to celebrate the death of a corpse whose decomposition had long corrupted the atmosphere. Alka-Seltzer, as the ruins of the Wall did not spare us either. Despite having fought against Stalinism and its avatars since the very beginning, we did not escape unharmed from a historical defeat of the workers' movement and its great hopes. Who can still believe that History will end up pronouncing justice, like Saint-Louis under his oak?

In January 1990, Ernest Mandel spoke at the Mutualité for a Ligue meeting on the events in Germany. After the long parenthesis of Stalinism, he essentially said, the revolution was starting up again at the point where it had halted with the murder of Rosa Luxemburg. The citizens' committees of Dresden and Berlin linked up with the tradition of the workers' councils of Saxony and Bavaria . . . These literary flights left many militants perplexed. They exchanged incredulous and dumbstruck glances. Glued to his principle of hope, his mythology, refusing to bury the world of yesterday and reconsider the commitment of a lifetime, Mandel's speech no longer held up. The words floated and burst like bubbles above a perplexed audience. This sorry meeting subsequently appeared as the sign of an impending demise.⁹

On the eve of the Second World War, Trotsky could envisage the future of the Soviet Union in the form of an alternative: either a democratic relaunch of the revolution, or final collapse under a bombardment of commodities. To believe Vasily Grossman in *Life and Fate*, a similar expectation existed in Stalingrad in the extremity of resistance. But, he bitterly concluded, the winners are not asked to render accounts. With the help of the Yalta compromise, the regime survived far longer than predicted, without either capitalist restora-

* Reference to Bensaïd's response to his comrade Gérard Filoche's call to celebrate the collapse of Stalinism with champagne at an LCR conference after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

tion or anti-bureaucratic revolution, surrounded by a glaxis of subaltern states.

The hope of an authentic revolution did not disappear for all that. We looked out for the most tenuous signs of it: in the Vorkuta strikes and the Berlin uprising of 1953, in the Budapest workers' councils of 1956, in the Chinese Cultural Revolution and the Shanghai Commune, in the Gdansk strikes and the creation of Solidarnosc. But time is not neutral. The 'propulsive force of October' was exhausted.¹⁰ Extensive bureaucratic growth became unsustainable. After the conquering ambitions of the Sputnik era and the industrial great leap forward of the postwar years, the country had been caught in its contradictions and was exhausting itself in an absurd arms race, illustrated by the episode of the polemic over the installation of Pershing and SS-20 missiles. Ascendant until then, the life expectancy curve began to decline in the mid-1970s. Pulverised by bureaucratic totalitarianism, Soviet society was no longer capable of renovation. Within a few months, the demonstrations in East Germany exchanged the slogan 'We are the people' (denouncing, in opposition to the 'people', the unnameable other, the despotic bureaucracy) for the slogan 'We are one people' – ambiguous in a quite different way. The social dynamic was drowned in rediscovered national pride. In the same way, the self-management slogans of Solidarnosc in Poland – 'Give us back our factories!' – were soon replaced by liberal venality – 'Buy our factories!'

With the counter-reform of the 1980s in the West, the attraction of commodity fetishism took the upper hand. Populations that had cast off the bureaucratic carapace dreamed of acceding to a Swedish-style wellbeing. We predicted, on the contrary, a dependent and subaltern insertion in the world market. According to the old law of uneven and combined development, more applicable today than ever, those who believed they were joining the First World by the royal road of the market found themselves cast into the Fourth World, with the horror of a mafia-style primitive accumulation of capital into the bargain. That is of course no reason to regret the old days that had nothing so good about them, and a social system that was in no way a desirable model. Poisoned or speared by the bureaucratic counter-revolution of the 1930s, the revolutionary ideal had undergone a slow death agony. Before it could resume, it had first to come to its end.

'Winds from the East!' some people triumphantly claimed, trusting in the direction of history and little attentive to its bad tricks.

Whirlwinds, it would be better to say. And sandstorms, as the first Gulf war and the Desert Storm campaign would shortly show. This was only the first episode in a logic of war whose stakes were a new division of the world and a redistribution of alliances, for which the collapse of the postwar balance had opened the possibility.

In a book published in spring 1989 to coincide with the bicentenary of the French Revolution, some months before the fall of the Berlin Wall and a few weeks before the Tiananmen demonstrations, I had my indignant bicentenarian say: 'Everything will have to be started up again and revised. Everything rediscussed and redebated. Everything put in question, the past and the future. Only then will we have put an end to Thermidor.'¹¹ And in my book on Joan of Arc, published in April 1991:

The end of history was proclaimed, as the end of time once was in the past. And now time continues to eternity, and history, refusing to stick to its end, shakes itself again. The old wounds start to suppurate. Once more, pain and convulsions foretell monstrous births. [. . .] War has returned to us. Or rather, it never left us. It has always been there, on the borders and at the margins. It was called cold, but that was just a semblance. Cold at the centre, and burning at the periphery.¹²

The end of the 'short twentieth century'. And continuing.

The years 1989–90 also marked a personal turning point for me. Prevented from travelling for reasons of health, I sat down to write for want of being able to act.

Edwy Plenel was then editing for Gallimard the series 'Au vif du sujet'. During a weekend at Juvanzé with Christine Daure and Christophe Aguiton in 1987, he suggested I should write a book for the twentieth anniversary of 1968. I was scarcely enthusiastic. The decennial ritual of gatherings of 68ers exasperated me. The further the event retreats into the past, the more its worn-out actors lean with compassion and moist eyes over their departed youth, the more the fraternity of reactionaries lift their glasses, and the more the repentant wax ironic at their former naivety. Over the years, these commemorative ceremonies increasingly resemble a carnival of dead souls.

Writing is neither a priesthood nor a *raison d'être*. Edwy, however, was obstinate, and returned to the charge in a friendly way on the occasion of the bicentennial. This time I had a directly political reason

for accepting. The commemoration under Mitterrand was announced in the form of a consensual entertainment, a great Girondin reconciliation, a marshy re-centring, with François Furet as the Thermidorean master of ceremonies. Instead of abandoning the event to the sorry celebration of memory, it was tempting to stoke up the embers and engage in a battle of remembrance.

Writing is always a problem. To harness yourself, Valéry said, 'you have to be gripped by a curiosity for form'. As neither a professional sociologist nor a historian, I needed a form that would make it possible to reconcile documentary seriousness with polemical passion. At the risk of being accused of megalomaniac identification, I chose a prosopopea in the first person. Speaking in the present, the embodied Revolution, an indignant and scorned bicentenarian, refuses – in contrast to the Republic, its parvenu twin – to settle down, to give in to routine and the mirages of social promotion. Rejecting its end, too often proclaimed, it resolutely seeks to be permanent and uninterrupted. This choice of form made it possible to remove the fatalism of the *fait accompli*, to re-establish the sense of historical options, to give the story its strategic subjectivity and give historical reason its share of emotion. To 'climb back up the slope of everything done', as Péguy would have said.

While editing my essay, Edwy did more than his function as series editor demanded. In the role of a Monsieur Ramirez, a towel over his shoulder and offering advice to a debutant boxer from the ringside, he bombarded me with books, flooded me with documents, and rushed around in a shared good humour.¹³

I thus owe it to the insistence of Edwy and Nicole that I began in 1988 to write something other than pamphlets, articles for internal bulletins, and circumstantial texts.¹⁴ Writing is an ordeal rather than a vocation. A book is a work in progress that is always recommenced, and gnaws at the brain. It demands immoderate effort for a result that is both disappointing and ephemeral. It would be wiser to write only indispensable books. A highly ecological precept! It would be better for the forests, and the libraries too.

Ideas, as is well known, come either while walking or cycling. As if, once a certain threshold is crossed, the road lets the mind wander. As if the gentle rustle of the wind in the spokes stimulates the desire for intellectual gambolling.

I did a great deal of walking in those years, sometimes accompanied by Christophe Aguiton, in Brazil and Mexico, during our

courses, and most frequently in the Jardin des Plantes. While I tried, on his advice, to regulate my pace and spare my breath, he continuously entertained me with his view of the world, the new communications technologies, the latest strategic breakthroughs of General Lucien Poirier and Jean-Paul Charnay, testing on me in passing various projects he was incubating. On return from Morocco, where he had visited his future father-in-law in Kenitra prison, he proposed an escape plan. No problem! With Christophe, there rarely were problems. But I found it hard to envisage a team from our *service d'ordre* playing desert rats in Morocco, with the thugs of Hassan II on our heels. He didn't insist.

But Christophe, a sporting combination of Professor Cyclopède and Géo Trouvetout, was never short on imagination.¹⁵ One idea followed another. They just had to be sorted out. This effervescence and overflowing energy led him to play a major role in the formation of the independent and radical SUD trade unions, in launching the marches of European unemployed between 1994 and 1997, in the development of ATTAC, in the organization of counter-summits and world social forums. From Québec to Mumbai, Tokyo to Porto Alegre, Bangkok to Cairo, the whole alterglobalist movement across the planet knew Aguiton.

Above all, I found ever-greater pleasure in cycle trips with Sophie. In summer, starting from our base camp at Bonnieux, we liked to set out at daybreak, skirt the cliffs of Lioux, climb up towards Sault via the fortified farm of Javon, pass through fields of lavender and broom, the gorges of the Nesque or the valley of Tolourenc, stopping over in Savoillan or Brantes, the latter perched on the north slope of Mont Ventoux. We either crossed the col de Murs to come down to Carpentras, the escarpment of Montmirail and the col de Propiac, where we visited Thérèse and Gilles Perrault who spent their holidays there. Or we headed west, following the upper Luberon valley via Oppède and Maubec, then, after the terrifying railway and motorway hub coming out of Cavaillon, climb gently towards Eygalières via the route Jean Moulin before ending up in Maussane.

On our longer trips, we loved to cross the Valensole plateau or the Camargue, round pic Saint-Loup and down the gorges of the Herault. The local rides around Bonnieux were just as charming: descending the coombe to take coffee and buy the paper at Lourmarin, visit Jean-Paul Clébert in his eagle's nest at Oppède-le-Vieux,¹⁶ climb the route des Claparèdes, leaving on our right the turnings to Buoux and

Sivergues, then the auberge of Regain, where the old cinephile Morénas had dropped anchor with the gems of his mobile cinema, and continue towards Saignon on a small byway (smelling of hazelnuts). At the end of the route the charming village of Auribeau appeared, nestling at the foot of the Mourre-Nègre, plunged in a permanent siesta no matter what time you reached it – time itself seemed to stand still. The young Olivier Besancenot spent his family holidays there, helping to gather the lavender harvest; in the presidential election of 2002, he scored a record 38 per cent here, a political-cultural exception against the grain of the Front National trend in the Vaucluse.

In either spring or autumn, we combed the Île-de-France: the valley of Chevreuse and Port-Royal, the forest of Compiègne where Joan of Arc was captured, Giverny with its water lilies, invaded by tourists, and the village of Chérence overlooking the bends of the Seine. When the weekend was promising, we took the train for the bay of the Somme, staying in Carantec with Juliette Inizan and Vincent Jullien, or Belle-Île with Muriel and Pierre Mesguich.

Thanks to the hospitality of Olivier Jullien and Annie Sicre at Bois-le-Roi (where Georges Bataille took refuge during the War), we could take a leisurely turn through the forest of Fontainebleau and the banks of the Seine: outward on the right bank via Héricy to Vulaines and Mallarmé's house, returning on the left bank via the enchanting village of Samois, still vibrating to the guitar of Django Reinhardt. Barbizon, of course, via the winding route of the heights of the Sole, with the ghosts of Millet, Stevenson and Trotsky, and the villa Les Marguerites where David Rousset spent his final years. Beyond Fontainebleau, we liked to follow the canal between Moret and Moncourt, and the Loing from Montigny to Grez, or else the secret valley of the Orvanne to the Flaggy windmill. Returning from Nargis or Dordives, we made a silent stop at the foot of the bell tower of Saint-Mathurin de Larchant, fantastic and jagged. From reading André Suarès I learned that this was in the Middle Ages the 'madmen's church', for those afflicted by a kind of 'leprosy of the soul':¹⁷ 'Coming from Nemours [. . .] one stops at the summit of the crest. The road drops to the valley bottom, where a tall and powerful finger stands: the bell tower of Larchant, that enormous ruin.' This is dedicated to Saint Mathurin, patron of the mad:

The mad are taken to Larchant for Whitsun. From Rouen to Dijon, from Reims to the Loire, the furious and melancholic are

gathered. The immense pilgrimage of the mad meets up at Montereau and Moret; the tributaries then join into a single river [. . .]. Finally, the enormous snake of madness, twisting and turning on the roads, arrives at Larchant.

This madness still haunts the shaky stones on which strange birds perch.

In the course of these excursions, between two choruses chosen to set the pace, we sketched out projects, totted up our revolts. I improvised on the saddle the framework of my philo-thrillers, abandoned as soon as conceived.¹⁸ But the books I did write in this decade owe a great deal to these cycle rides.

Carried away by a writing mania, I published three 'essays of historical philosophy' between 1989 and 1991: the one on the French Revolution, and those on Walter Benjamin and Joan of Arc. Form is the resolution of a doubt. *Walter Benjamin, sentinelle messianique* demanded a fragmentary style, drawing a kind of mosaic. *Jeanne de guerre lasse*, on the other hand, imposed a dialogue form, echoing the 'dialogue between history and the embodied soul'.¹⁹ Without losing anything of her historical consistency, her rooted and 'earthy' density, the Pucelle, a robust village girl who listened only to her inner voices, became in her turn a voice and a spectral presence.

These three books make up a kind of trilogy on history and memory. Walter Benjamin's theses on the concept of history are its keystone. Without having been at the time a well-defined project, this 'critique of historical reason' was a kind of necessary transition, before renewing on a new basis the question of Marx and the thousand (and one) Marxisms.

The Marrano Enigma

‘This spectral people.’

— Heinrich Heine

We are second-generation survivors, escapees from a ‘monstrous time’. A Jewish identity is something I was born into. When the Gestapo came to arrest my father on 29 December 1943, following a denunciation, the men in leather examined my ten-year-old sister’s sex; a child with a circumcised penis would certainly have been taken away. My cousin Reine was not so lucky; she was deported in convoy no. 87, along with her brother Roger and my uncles Jules (her father) and René. None of them returned.¹ I grew up with these ghosts, the shadow of the Judeocide on my heels.

Is it ever possible to prise oneself away from the tie of one’s origins? My father was not at all religious. On his deathbed, he insisted once more that he didn’t want a rabbi or any ‘affectation’. He was buried on the Sabbath, without Kaddish or any ceremony other than the handfuls of earth cast on his coffin. Yet he made a point of having me circumcised. In 1946 this was a sign of fidelity and survival, a challenge to a thousand-year-old curse. In the showers at summer camp, I sensed that my visibly snipped foreskin attracted attention, like a candle in a storm.

Despite the closeness of the genocide, my parents never thought of sparing me the mark of a Jewish name. In the 1950s, before the returnees from Algeria arrived, names like Benamou, Benichou, Benkimoun, etc. were not yet so common. Indeed, the exotic ‘Ben’ – meaning ‘son’ in both Hebrew and Arabic – often led to my being taken for an Arab. An ironic confusion of origins . . .

So we had survived. But ‘we’? This ‘we’ of uncertain membership might have dissolved over time, in the melting-pot of *métissage* and assimilation. The tragedy, however, resurrected it.

I could not claim a Jewish identity in rabbinical terms – a semi-Jew, at most.² But the marks of name and circumcision are not readily escaped. My mother herself ended up discovering (or inventing) a distant Jewish ancestry, most likely imaginary. The fact is that she often had to share the trials of anti-Semitism. In Oran, the mere fact of marrying a Jew aroused ostracism in the self-contained colonial circle. Abnormal children and hereditary syphilis were all predicted. Under the Occupation, she had to confront both stigma and the Gestapo. Following the arrest of my father, she trailed the parish and episcopal offices to obtain a certificate of ‘non-membership of the Jewish race’ that saved my father from deportation.

My parents always accepted their Jewishness without shame or denial, but they never placed any hope in the state of Israel. My father, I seem to recall, welcomed the Franco-British expedition to Suez. Yet I can never remember him displaying the slightest Arabophobia. Having grown up at Mascara, in the midst of young Arabs, he maintained a tacit understanding with his clients of Maghrebian origin. On the other hand, however, he kept a circumspect distance from those tribal solidarities and family codes that his younger sister, my aunt Julie, pompously referred to as ‘proprieties’. On Thursdays, after stocking up on coffee and olives at the café-owners’ cooperative, and buying crabs and winkles for the Sunday *kémia*, we would visit my aunt Georgette, whose health had been ruined by deportation. She reigned in the back room of her café, with a bulky hairpiece held in place by a net; it would have been little surprise to see her looking into a crystal ball. Yet the clairvoyant in the family (listed under this heading in the Yellow Pages) was another aunt, Mimi, the widow of my deported uncle René. She kept a dubious establishment of some kind after the War, then turned to clairvoyance at the same time as she started losing her sight!

In an insalubrious part of the town centre, which housed various illegal businesses alongside regular prostitution, Georgette’s bar (‘Chez Jules’, in memory of her deported husband) became the meeting-place for cousins, aunts, and more distant relatives. Disembarking from Oran after independence, or from Fez where they had also established themselves, they rebuilt here their family archipelago. With an evident disdain, my father called this gregarious clan ‘the syndicate’.

An outsider in his own tribe, my father was Jewish neither by religion nor by community adherence, but he was so out of fidelity and

defiance. He spoke little of his interment at Drancy, and rarely of his deported brothers. But he wore, none the less, a little gold chain with the Star of David. And if any of his customers in the bar dropped the slightest hint of anti-Semitism, he would produce his yellow star from Drancy, kept within arm's reach in the cash register. Without saying a word, he would deposit this under the nose of the culprit, who unless he immediately retracted would find himself landing on his face in the gutter. He had never got beyond the school-leaving certificate, the sports paper *L'Équipe* was his main daily reading. I almost never saw him with a book in his hand, with the exception of *The Mixed Waters* by Roger Ikor,* and *The Last of the Just*.

He was a non-Jewish Jew, free equally from denial and from identitarian panic. Jean-Claude Milner would certainly have qualified him as an inauthentic Jew, a 'Jew of denial' in contrast to the supposed authenticity of the 'Jew of affirmation'.† This Heideggerian jargon of authenticity is still used to play nasty tricks. Despite breaking with his community, my father was in no way the parvenu Jew, always ready, according to Benny Lévy,‡ to swing into the camp of scoundrels, like the Spanish *conversos* who became inquisitors.

I was bound to inherit this lack of belonging. I had no idea of Yom Kippur, Pesach or Hanukah. But my parents' advice was strict: never let an anti-Semitic expression pass without reaction. Better to risk a bad outcome than to give way on this principle.

This intransigence would expand to a struggle against any kind of racism or xenophobia. As an adolescent, I was trained by a generation of Jews from central and Eastern Europe who had experienced persecution, war and Judeocide. Communism, for them, was the logical conclusion to the cosmopolitanism of the Enlightenment, and the hope of a response at last to the obsessive 'Jewish question'. They had fought in the International Brigades in Spain, or in the ranks of the FTP and MOI during the Resistance. They had done so both as proletarians (hat-makers, tailors and cobblers) and as Communists, Bundists or Left Oppositionists, not first and foremost (or not only) as Jews.

* Roger Ikor's *Les eaux mêlées* won the Prix Goncourt in 1955. It explores the experience over three generations of a Jewish family who emigrated to France.

† Jean-Claude Milner, formerly a Maoist militant, is a leading Lacanian known in English chiefly for *For the Love of Language* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990). More recently, he has devoted himself to combating the 'new anti-Semitism'.

‡ Secretary to Jean-Paul Sartre in his last years, Benny Lévy went on to embrace orthodox Judaism. His most well-known work is *Être juif* (Paris: Verdier, 2003).

Elective genealogies are worth more than unchosen heredity. Our spiritual ancestors were Abraham Léon, Hersch Mendel, Isaac Deutscher, Ignaz Reiss, Joseph Berger, Meyer Schapiro, Ygael Gluckstein (Tony Cliff), Jakob Moneta, Léopold Trepper, Henri Curiel.* Going further back in time, they were Heinrich Heine, Moses Hess, Karl Marx, Rosa Luxemburg, Lev Davidovitch Bronstein, Adolf Joffe, David Riazanov...†

* Hersch Menedel (Sztokfisz), 1890–1968, born in Poland, he spent fourteen years in prisons and camps. He worked as a leather tanner, organising several strikes. On the Bund leadership from 1912, and worked with Trotsky on *Nashe Slovo* in Paris. Took part in the Russian Revolution in Moscow, before joining the Polish Communist Party in Warsaw in 1919, serving on the revolutionary military committee planning for insurrection. In 1928 he went to study at the Comintern's Lenin School in Moscow, and on his return to Poland in 1930 was a driving force in the Left Opposition. Spent WWII in Grenoble, before heading for Israel.

Isaac Deutscher, 1907–67, journalist. Member of the illegal Polish Communist Party, becoming editor of its clandestine press, before joining the Left Opposition. He signed up to the Polish Socialist Party, in accordance with the entryist turn. In 1938, he and his Polish comrades opposed proclaiming the creation of the Fourth International. Emigrated to Britain in 1939. A biographer of Trotsky.

Joseph Berger (J. Berger-Barzilai; original name: Isaac Zeliarnik), 1904–78, as a child lived in the part of Poland belonging to Austria. Emigrated to Palestine in 1920, originally a Zionist. Took part in the foundation of the Communist Party of Palestine in 1922, became its secretary. From 1932 lived in Moscow, arrested in 1935, and sent to prisons and labour camps in Siberia. Rehabilitated in 1956, went to Israel and wrote his memoirs (1971).

Jakob Moneta, 1914–2012, born in Poland, under the Austro-Hungarian empire. In 1931 went into exile in Germany, joining the youth wing of the SAP (a left-wing breakaway from Social Democracy). In 1933 he headed for Palestine, where the Arab uprising put him off Zionism. Co-founded the only non-sectarian trade union. Spent two years in a British prison. Member of the German section of the FI and of the SPD. Social attaché of the West German embassy, he secretly helped the FLN. From 1962 to 1978, director of the IG Metall union's monthly publication. Later in the PDS and Die Linke.

Léopold Trepper, 1904–82, joined the Hachomer Hatzair youth organisation as a high-school student, on its central leadership from 1920. An apprentice clocksmith, he was one of the organisers of the 1923 general strike. He was a member of the Communist Party in Palestine, and was repeatedly imprisoned. In Russia, he took part in the GRU military intelligence service. Sent to France, he helped set up the Red Orchestra anti-Nazi network, but was then imprisoned. The Gestapo attempted to make him a double agent, which he turned to his advantage and helped the French Resistance. However, on his return to the Soviet Union after the Liberation of Paris, he was jailed for ten years. He later lived in Poland then Israel.

Henri Curiel, 1914–78, an Egyptian from a French-speaking Jewish family of Italian descent. In 1939 he founded the Democratic Union and then, in 1943, the Egyptian Movement for National Liberation, one of the three pro-Communist organisations. Repeatedly imprisoned and then expelled in 1950, he went to France where he worked to build support for national liberation movements, including that of Algeria – earning him eighteen months in prison. Murdered in a political assassination.

† David Riazanov, 1870–1938, before 1917 he led 'conciliationist' and 'unitary' currents and then joined the inter-district organisation which fused with the Bolsheviks in 1917. Greatly knowledgeable about Marxism – which he had held to since 1890 – after the October Revolution he led the Marx-Engels Institute, only to be excluded from the Party and denounced in 1931. He died in prison.

A splendid gallery of ancestors! In an unstable equilibrium between their milieu of origin and their inclination to universality, these miscreant, mutant Jews stubbornly strove to believe in an international emancipation. But the ground was cut from under their feet: 'The decay of bourgeois Europe has compelled the Jew to embrace the nation state. That is the paradoxical consummation of the Jewish tragedy'.³

In the course of the 1980s, when the concept of totalitarianism gained ground, we (re)discovered Antelm, Rousset, Primo Levi. Certain people were then amazed that the first generation of survivors had been able to relativize the singularity of the Judeocide, dissolving it into the mass of Nazi crimes and so reducing the unheard-of to what was already known, as if by way of protection from the disquieting enigma of an unprecedented event.⁴ Ernest Mandel, in particular, was criticized for having compared the death camps to other crimes (such as colonial massacres) and having sought to explain this specific tragedy in terms of a causal chain going back to a system based on fragmented instrumental rationality. Confronted with victorious Nazism, Trotsky apparently opened the way to this kind of interpretation by stating summarily that 'capitalism is vomiting an undigested barbarism'.

It was certainly hard for such Enlightenment figures to introduce an irreducible anthropological element into historical social relations. They could, however, analyse a 'dehumanization' bound up with capitalist reification, the divorce between technology and emotions, the administrative routine of fragmented work and the 'contract of mutual indifference' characteristic of commodity society, along with a psychoanalytic reading of contemporary neuroses. This made us better prepared to confront the 'repetition of the monstrous', or what Günther Anders called 'the fate of monstrosity'.⁵

It is readily understandable why those internationalist Jews who escaped the disaster refused to be reduced to the role of victim. They wanted to take revenge on those who had tried to nail them against their will to the wall of religious or ethnic membership, to subject them to the fate and unhappiness of their race. They were determined to choose for themselves the terrain and the weapons of their combat for humanity. Their humanist faith and their principle of universality may well appear naïve or unreasonably optimistic after the gloomy end of the twentieth century. But they were none the less legitimate.

Helped by the charm of Paul Newman, the film *Exodus* had a strong impact on the adolescents that we were in the late 1950s. Troubled by Western guilt for the genocide, some young 'native

French' were even tempted to make their way to the new frontier guarded by armed kibbutzim. Echoing the edifying Manichean literature of the postwar years, it was easy for them to identify as good Cowboys besieged by treacherous Indians/Palestinians. This new exodus seemed to enable them to reconcile their own survival with the socialist adventure. Vocations were discovered.

The Jeunesse Communiste Révolutionnaire, founded in April 1966, counted a disproportionate share of young militants of Jewish origin: amongst the names figured Recanati, Cyrulnik, Najman, Cuchart, Harrari, Rzepski, Rubinstein, Landau, Czalcinsky, Milewsky, Rogozinsky, Pieckny, Weisgal, Zeliksonn, Maler, Rotman, Baruch, Meyer, Rosenfeld, Rosvègue, Rosenzweig, Meyer, Mikhaïlovitch, Blum, Roterdam, Barsony, Tauber, Treiner, Johsua, Chaouat, Hassoun, Slyper, Dreyfus, Trat, Godchau, Sidi, Cohen, Bénichou, Samary, Bortein, Weber and Krivine . . .

It was Annie Kriegel who jibed that the only reason the League's discussions were not held in Yiddish is that I was Sephardic.⁶ The fact is that Oriental Jews were a tiny minority on the far left at this time, often being of Egyptian origin: the Lévy brothers on the Maoist side, the Johsua brothers, the psychoanalyst Jacques Hassoun, Gérard Chaouat and Jacques Stambouli in the Ligue.⁷ Some of their number had a family connection with Egyptian Communism, including the great figure of Henri Curiel.⁷

This strong component of Jewish origin among the rebel youth of the 1960s is hardly a sociological mystery. They were, for the most part, sons and daughters of survivors. In other circumstances they would have included many candidates for the '*affiche rouge*',[†] budding

* Gérard Chaouat, member of the FI since the 1960s and active in the JCR. Active in the LCR, NPA and GA. Medical researcher at the INSERM institute.

Jacques Hassoun, 1936–99, born in Alexandria, aged fifteen he joined the Egyptian Dror (a Marxist–Zionist movement) and tried to create a Jewish section of Henri Curiel's Democratic Movement for National Liberation, which was then repressed. Studying medicine in France, he passed from the PCF to *La Voie Communiste*, the JCR and the Ligue Communiste. A director of *Garde-Fous*, he taught psychoanalysis, refusing to disassociate it from Marxism. A member of the anti-racist MRAP, the League for the Rights of Man, and the France–Palestine association. Author of a dozen works.

Jacques Stambouli, member of central committee of the Ligue, active in the anti-militarist campaigns. Joined the independent green left grouping the Alternatifs at the end of the 1980s.

† The infamous 'red poster' issued by the Vichy and German authorities in spring 1944, denouncing the 'Manouchian Group' of the FTP-MOI resistance whose members would all be murdered by the Nazis.

Marcel Raymans or Thomas Eleks. This is probably one of the secrets behind the intrepid performance of our *service d'ordre* in the 1970s. Our war had not yet ended.

In 1967, just a year after the foundation of the JCR, the Six-Day War put our juvenile internationalism to a brutal test. There were a few cases of volunteer engagement in the Israeli military, though these defections were exceptional. In the midst of the crisis, we invited Nathan Weinstock to give a lecture in the rue de Rennes on his book *Le Sionisme contre Israël*,⁸ which had just been published. It was a stormy evening. From being intransigent against anti-Semitism, we now came out also as resolutely anti-Zionist, deeply convinced that, far from being incompatible, the two things went together. Refusing to accept the pariah status of the Palestinians essentially meant remaining faithful to the history of Jewish suffering. We could not yet envisage the siege of Beirut, the fate inflicted on the population of the occupied territories, the colonisation of the West Bank and the construction of a new wall of shame. The test of the Six-Day War was none the less an integral part of our internationalist education and our vision of the world.

Fuelled by a universalism that was unyielding towards communitarian nostalgia, we intended to choose our own struggle rather than be subject to the fatalism of origins. The 'Jewish question' seemed to us, if not resolved, then at least in the process of steadily dissolving in the class struggle and general fraternisation. But if it was pressed back into the private space of family attachments, this did not stop it from surreptitiously breaking out in our midst, in the form of private jokes and Jewish stories, nods and winks, certainly exasperating for those excluded from them. In 1969, Pierre Rousset returned very fired up from a stay in the Palestinian camps. He insisted on our decisive responsibility to help break the communitarian myth of Zionism. We were naturally already convinced of this. But a caustic voice called out: 'What is it that this guy wants to break?' Pierre hardly appreciated this ironic humour. He railed against such ties of affinity, feeling rejected by them.

In the age of imperialism and colonialism, racial anti-Semitism is part and parcel of the logic of modern racisms. Despite the pogroms, Zionism remained a minority current among the Jews of central Europe so long as there was still a hope of social liberation. The experience of the genocide made Israel a refuge state. Yet this creation of a 'Jewish state', ethnic and theocratic, based on the right of

blood, was viewed right from its foundation as a deadly blind alley by such people as Isaac Deutscher and Martin Buber. Franz Rosenzweig and Walter Benjamin sought a third way between assimilation and Zionism, that of a Judaism of diaspora or 'dis-assimilation'. Freud also showed great reservation towards Herzl's project, fearing the 'unrealistic fanaticism of our people' and rejecting 'the illusion of an unjustified hope'.⁹ This was, of course, before the great catastrophe.

To set up a nation-state, and territorialise against the current (at a time when nation-states were on the decline under the impact of the globalised market, with its many diasporas and *métissages*), was a trap that only led to new tragedies. Isaac Deutscher bitterly saw Auschwitz as 'the terrible cradle' of the new Jewish nation, the (re) founding event of a 'negative community' born out of persecution. It was painful for him to think that 'Jewishness and its continuity' owed its new lease of life to extermination: 'It was from the ashes of six million dead that the phoenix of Jewry has risen. What a resurrection!'¹⁰ Maxime Rodinson also stressed the paradox of a Judaism preserved by anti-Semitism and by the modern political Zionism that is partly the consequence of this. The creation of the state of Israel newly crystallised a diaspora identity that was tending to evaporate for want of a coherent base, whether cultural, social or even religious: 'I do not believe that this is an occasion for rejoicing.'¹¹

A Jewish memory erected into state memory becomes sadly selective. Under the grip of the state, the culture of exile and wandering has been petrified into official history and *raison d'état*. The reconstruction of a mythic history for a people who escaped from history tends to justify a communitarian retrenchment and to strengthen a genealogical identity founded on an archaic right of blood. Unless the work of Israeli historians on the origins of their state takes a critical turn, and manages in due course to fill the great black hole dug in Jewish memory.

We are fortunate to have had the likes of Spinoza, Heine, Marx, Freud, Rosa Luxemburg . . . and so many other heretics, who keep the thread of a different story possible.¹² Fortunately, against the egoism of a 'chosen people', so easily reversible into a curse, we have had their spark of exuberant universality, too expansive to be containable in the narrow space of Zionism and its deadly forward flight.

In the eyes of Benny Lévy, Jewish atheism has been only a wretched subterfuge to conceal ignorance of the 'irremissibility of

being Jewish'. But there have been glorious antecedents, starting with that of Bernard Lazare, that 'atheist glistening with the word of God'.* As an atheist internationalist, I have never felt Jewish by race, religion or language. And yet I remain Jewish to a certain extent and up to a certain point, out of unconditional solidarity, not with a perishable state, but with those men and women who have been persecuted under that name. Jewish by history, essentially; at the opposite extreme from an immobility without history, such as is claimed today by those new mystics for whom everything has always been there since the beginning, for all eternity. This ecstasy of origins aims in fact to spirit away political revolt against the fatality of the world. It is fuelled by disappointment with a history that seems to have betrayed the promises that were unwisely ascribed to it. 'No political vision of the world! No history! No dialectic! Everything is there from the beginning [. . .]. Return is all that is needed.'¹³

The new commandments could not be more clear.

Many people, by becoming Communists, hoped to repair the particular wrong done to them by integrating into the movement of universal emancipation, to erase the stigma imposed on them by the voluntary choice of a common struggle. But this was not how things turned out. Marx's formula, that Judaism perpetuates itself not despite history, as an anachronism, but through history and its tragedies, has been confirmed in a sinister fashion.

This history indeed took an unexpected turn with the Nazi genocide, defying the beatific illusion of a unilinear forward progress. The persistence of a bureaucratic anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union also helped shatter such confidence in an internationalist future. The Stalinist regime mobilized old chauvinist resentments against the Jews (over-represented in the state apparatus) and made them a scapegoat for popular frustrations. The enigma of the Jewish question was thought to have been resolved, or on the way to being so. Yet it has continued to resurge with its poisonous legacy.

By defining this people without a state as a 'people-class', Abraham Léon genuinely sought to give flesh to spirit, and resolve Péguy's

* Bernard Lazare (aka Lazare Bernard), 1865–1903, journalist and literary critic. An anarchist opposed to both anti-Semitism and Zionism. Contacted by the Dreyfus family in order to defend the captain – falsely accused of treason in an anti-Semitic smear campaign – he was the first Dreyfusard, in 1896 publishing *Une erreur judiciaire, la vérité sur l'Affaire Dreyfus*.

equation of the 'corporeal soul'. Relocated in its historical reality, this 'people-class' seemed logically destined to dissolve in a classless society. But Léon did not rule out the opposite possibility, that Zionism's demand to found a new state might be fulfilled. Whatever the intention of its founding fathers, this would then not be a mythic 'national renaissance', but rather an untimely national birth against the current, bearing within it the germs of new tragedies. The accomplishment of the Zionist design would thus be the monstrous product of a monstrous moment in human history. Half a century after its foundation, Israel has not become the refuge proclaimed, but the place in the world where Jews are most threatened.

Trotsky had also hoped, in the Enlightenment tradition, for a socialist solution to the Jewish question. With the presentiment of disaster, he sadly recognised, in an interview given to an American paper in 1937: 'During my youth, I was more inclined to believe that Jews would be assimilated in their respective countries and that the Jewish question would disappear in an almost automatic way. The historical development of the last quarter of a century has not confirmed this prognosis.' The question would not be settled either by forced assimilation, or by the building of a gigantic national ghetto, whose stupidity had already been shown by the sinister bureaucratic farce of Birobidzhan. The foundation of a Jewish state would be on the contrary a new death trap, with the spectre of a new Massada on the horizon. The door through which the Messiah could arrive was still narrower than had been imagined.

A small revolutionary minority in Palestine, Jewish and Arab, courageously opposed the partition of 1947. I recall here the desolate wisdom of the veteran Palestinian Trotskyist, Jabra Nicola, warning us against possible illusions about the virtues of Arab nationalism: 'in this region, he insisted, relations of domination were reversible. Established today in the role of oppressive colonist, the Jewish community could one day find itself in the position of a national minority oppressed within the Arab world. No matter how difficult, remote and uncertain, the only internationalist solution, in the long run, was therefore the self-determination of all national communities, and their voluntary coexistence within a multinational state.'¹⁴

* Jabra Nicola (1912–74), Palestinian Communist imprisoned by the British authorities (1940–42). Member of Israeli socialist organisation Matzpen. Member of the International Executive Committee of the FI.

Our hostility to the definition of a state in religious or ethnic terms, however, did not lead us to flatter the Palestinian nationalism which we actively supported. As distinct from the likes of Alain Geismar (since recycled in the ministerial offices of the 'plural left') sporting the *keffieh*, we were never tempted to disguise ourselves as *fedayeen* in an attempt to make the Latin Quarter a 'liberated zone'. For reasons both strategic and moral, we were convinced that there would be no military victory for the Palestinian movement without a division in the Zionist bloc and fractures within Israeli society itself. This conviction was reinforced by the bold experience of our Israeli comrades in Matzpen. In this epoch of Maoist exaggeration, our subtle dialectic of the universal and the particular led to our being accused either of tepidity towards the cause of the oppressed, or, worse still, of indulgence towards Zionist colonisation.

A terrible double bind and double suspicion! For some people, political anti-Zionism, opposed to the occupation and colonisation of Palestine, was suspected of racial anti-Semitism. For others, recognition of the fact of an Israeli nation was suspected of colonial complacency.

In 1982, the war in Lebanon, the siege of Beirut and the massacres at Sabra and Shatila marked a turning point in the region, and in the solidarity movement with the Palestinian cause.¹⁵ For the first time, a demonstration of Jews against the Lebanese war took place in Paris. Although aware of the ambiguity for an internationalist citizen of the world to demonstrate 'as a Jew', I went all the same, without telling my comrades. A protest that made it possible to disassociate Judaism and Zionism, Jews and the state of Israel, seemed useful: touching the heart of communitarian mythology, it was more embarrassing to the Zionist authorities than a demonstration of the left that was ten times more numerous, and harder to disqualify by claiming an anti-Semitic undercurrent. On the other hand, it showed Arab militants attached to the Palestinian cause that this was not a religious conflict but a political one, its lines of cleavage cutting across communal borders. In this demonstration, on the place des Ternes, I discovered Marcel-Francis Kahn (one of its initiators) and Alexandre Minkowski, but also, to my great surprise, several militants from the Ligue who had spontaneously followed the same line of thought as myself, and were relieved to see me there.*

* Marcel-Francis Kahn, born 1929, doctor. Participated in the brigades in solidarity with Yugoslavia after the Tito-Stalin split. Active in the PSU and a member of the

The problem is repeatedly posed, as successive Israeli governments seek to communalise or ethnicise the Middle East conflict, in order to deny the Palestinian question as a national question, and to depoliticise the right of Palestinians to a sovereign state. Their explicit desire is to see the very figure of the Palestinian, as constituted by half a century of resistance and recognised internationally by the Oslo accords, once more obliterated in an undifferentiated 'Arab world', or in the vagueness of Islamic movements. In France, the call of Jewish communal representatives to 'identify with the state of Israel', their claim to speak in the name of all Jews, transformed in self-defence into accomplices of Sharon and his crimes, impelled us, at the start of the second Intifada, to take a collective position 'as Jews'.¹⁶

A few years ago, I could not have imagined one day being associated with an initiative of this kind, claiming the legitimacy of a particular origin to justify a political position. What this had taken was a palpable deterioration in the balance of forces, and a deep decline in political consciousness. Many signatories of these texts experienced the same reticence and scruples. In the end, the criterion of usefulness prevailed over such doubts. The resonance of these initiatives ended up justifying them. They made it possible for hundreds of signatories to emerge from individual rumination and collectively to express their refusal to be annexed against their will to Israeli exactions in the occupied territories, their refusal to let the Judeocide serve as alibi for a politics of colonisation, conquest and apartheid.¹⁷

'Not in our name!' By taking this stand, not 'despite' but 'because of' being Jewish, we wanted to break the image of communal consensus, and help Arab militants, faced with the rise of fundamentalism, to emphasise that the conflict was political and not religious or racial in character. A symmetrical appeal by militants of Arab origin resident in France also appeared, strongly condemning 'any racist or confessional drift, in either the Middle East or France'.¹⁸

Is it possible to define a 'Jewish identity'? Is this a mere reflection

leadership of the Comité Vietnam National. A member of the LCR in the 1970s and co-founder of the Association France-Palestine de Solidarité. Mounted a fierce denunciation of homeopathy.

Alexandre Minkowski, 1915–2004, doctor. Author of *Le Mandarin aux pieds nus*. Worked for the humanitarian aid secretariat under Bernard Kouchner in the 1980s–90s, later active in Génération Ecologie.

of oneself in the view of the other, simply the consequence of being 'taken as such' or considering oneself such? Or the result of a remote mythical election? Spinoza unmasked this imposture a long time ago, showing that what was 'chosen' about the Jews 'consists simply in the temporal felicity of their state and material advantages'. I have no desire, for my part, to feel chosen in this way, whether to share the blessings of this election or to bear the crushing responsibility according to which Jews are supposed to be better than common mortals.

The banishment imposed on Uriel de Costa and Spinoza already raised the thorny problem of knowing where the boundaries of Jewry are drawn, and who has the right to draw them. Who can decide on such membership? Who is the judge of it? Some people responded to this embarrassing dilemma by annexing the blasphemous philosopher: 'He is one of us, despite everything, whether he will or no.' A double blow, which makes it possible to draw prestige from the member that one amputates. Others, on the contrary, prefer to strictly delimit the circle of belonging.

For Levinas, non-practising Jews who see themselves as atheists 'remain Jews all the same'. It is impossible to escape one's condition. Is being Jewish 'irremissible', an implacable fate sealed by origin? Freud admitted being bound to Judaism in this way by a tie difficult to define, which was 'neither faith nor national pride'.¹⁹ Neither national community nor religious community? A cultural tribe, then, hard to circumscribe, beyond difference of language, ritual, and territorial dispersion? 'A religion with certain characteristics of ethnicity', Maxime Rodinson replied: a vague formula, apt to the image of that 'spectral people' whose wandering, for Heine, was 'the melancholy symbol of humanity'.

Perhaps this paradoxical identity is found in the emblematic figure of the Marrano, a Catholic without faith, Jewish by choice but without knowledge, a rent and divided being, attached to perpetuating a Judaism adulterated by the obsession of secrecy and torn by repressed doubts. After being freed from persecution, having experienced Christian universalism, Marranos no longer recognised their own countenance. They had become mutants, non-Jewish Jews, torn between exclusive communal membership and the opening to a universal humanity, between a formalism of fidelity and an infidelity that was still more faithful. This secrecy became a strange kind of badge. They belonged without belonging, and painfully lived this unbelonged belonging, this training in modern liberty.

What is fascinating in the figure of the imaginary Marrano is its double identity without duplicity, its duplication without rift, the transition from one world and one era to another. An ambivalence, refractory to roots and rootings. An intimate wound. The problem with Marranism is to escape from it without denying oneself, to find, in transition and passage, a way out that is neither return to an identical self nor rallying to the cause of the victors: an escape towards the excluded third option, an endurance to give life to a text beneath the text, and another still beneath the subtext. An aptitude to perform this game of hide and seek that escapes the identifications of police and tyranny. And certainly there have been, and probably still will be, many Marrano communists.

The hasty Marrano is patient, constrained constantly to disagree with himself, to think against himself, to appeal to his other, without ever being able to rest in the comfort of an appeased reconciliation. For him, inheritance becomes problematic. An inheritance that cannot be used, on which, Derrida said, one is summoned to take a decision, resisting it all the better to test it. This dialectic of faithless fidelity is opposed to any fantasy of purity, any kind of fundamentalism. Perhaps political Marranism leads in this way to an outcome between identitarian panics and the undifferentiated diversity of commodity cosmopolitanism. To a re-invented internationalism.

Before his *Spectres of Marx*, I had read Derrida intermittently, following the inspiration of the moment. I should have noticed much earlier the signs of what we shared without realising it, beyond the exile from an Algeria both close and distant. The experience of discordance and going against the grain, of the logic of spectrality, of curiosity about the Marrano 'in breach of belonging'. Derrida did not believe for one second that the Marrano business could be readily wrapped up: 'And what if not only Spinoza, but Marx himself, was a Marrano, a kind of illegal immigrant?'

The Marrano is both patient and impatient. Slowly. He bets on the long run.

The Gymnastics of the Possible

It is the effect of a singular intelligence to imagine that the social revolution is a conclusion, a closure of humanity in the blessedness of dead calm. It is the effect of an ambition both naïve and bad, idiotic and cunning, to wish that a social revolution will bring humanity to a close. To close off humanity would be the effect of the most fearsome religious survival. Far from socialism being definitive, it is preliminary, prerequisite, necessary, indispensable, but insufficient. It is before the threshold. It is not the end of humanity. It is not even its beginning.

— Charles Péguy, *De la raison*

I do not know what coincidences led me, towards the end of the 1970s, to take an interest in the Kabbalah and Jewish mysticism. Perhaps it was my reading of Fritz Mauthner's *Critique du langage*. As one reading leads to another, I continued with Scholem, Benjamin, Landauer, Rosenzweig, Bloch, Lukács and Tucholsky. The Benjamin trail led back to Blanqui and Péguy, that of Péguy crossed with that of Georges Sorel and Bernard Lazare. As well as the contingency of encounters, this constellation followed a hidden necessity. Undoubtedly my curiosity was the sign of a theoretical worry, at a time when the confident certainties of initial commitments had been put to a severe test. Faced with the collapse of former perspectives, we needed an aleatory materialism, allied with the subtleties of messianic reason.

It was a moment for seeking new resources. The question was to unpick the notions of utopia, messianism and hope, to cast off that 'hopefulness' for which Günther Anders criticised Ernst Bloch. A long time ago, Spinoza had already seen hope as an inconstant joy, 'born from the image of something future or past whose outcome is held to be doubtful'.

It was also a time when many people, seeing the breakdown of their project, made their way back to the fold of community. Close friends, who had married by civil ceremony, felt the belated need to attend the synagogue. Disappointed internationalists set out in search of their roots. Cosmopolitan rebels sought an identitarian genealogy. Benny Lévy, the former 'gédéon'¹ of the Gauche Prolétarienne, went off to meditate in a yeshiva. Older communists, defeated and disappointed, had already made this bitter return. Stéphane Barsony, a veteran of the International Brigades who had tired of the steep paths of disenchantment, tried in the evening of his life to find in the state of Israel at least minimal attenuating circumstances, in which he probably himself found it hard to believe.* Why, he asked with his delicious Hungarian accent and a bitter humour, is it only Jews who have to prove they are better than others?

By plunging into Jewish literature, my only concern was to understand a tradition and culture that were after all foreign to me. I sought above all, in this exploration, to confront the rationalism of the Enlightenment with other paths of knowledge. Going back in time on the traces of Gabriel Albiac or Yirmiyahu Yovel, I discovered in this way the syncretism of the Andalucians, the subtleties of the Dispute of Barcelona, the insubordination of Uriel da Costa and the calm fury of Spinoza.²

On the eve of the 1980s, navigating in the dense and troubled waters of an opaque present, stuck in their oily slicks, we were pulled downward by the ghosts of the century. These were no smiling spectres but embittered revenants, full of disappointments and resentments. We had set out to close the terrible parenthesis of their great theatre of cruelty. We suddenly woke up with a jump, prey to the bad dreams of a haunted memory. To escape the test of disaster, the era did its utmost to cast out ballast.

No more past, no more futures. No more expectations, no more 'dreams into the future': *De prisa, de prisa!* Live fast!

Perhaps it was no longer midnight in the century, but a noxious late afternoon, voluptuously dying away in a fading red. The death of Marx. The death of communism. The proclaimed end of history. The endgame.

* Stéphane Barsony, 1915–99, of Romanian origin. Doctor, militant of the FTP-MOI in the Resistance. Father of two Toulouse members of the JCR-LCR: Jacques, also a doctor, and Pierre, a cartoonist known under the name Piotr.

In this time of counter-reform and restoration, as for Blanqui after the crushing of the Commune, only the forks in the road seemed still open for hope. On condition that Benjamin's untimely messiah arrived to wake Marx up from a long dogmatic sleep and release him from Stalinist nightmares.

The Benjamin trail steadily revealed a landscape of thought (Blanqui, Péguy, Sorel, Proust) that was disconcerting for an orthodox Marxist. For Péguy, a militant socialist, the supposed meaning of history could only serve as diversion from an imperious responsibility here and now. It could not release us, in the name of abstract historical laws, from the appointment of the present. No one can escape the fearsome duty of deciding fallibly, humanly, in the flesh. At the risk of losing oneself. Socialism is not a promised land, a last judgement, a final and enclosed goal of humanity. It remains 'before the threshold', leaning on the unknown, in the inquietude of the present and the 'power of historical dissent'.

Unearthed by Benjamin from the great hibernation of the archive, Blanqui's strategic 'bifurcations' made it possible to glimpse a different relationship between history and event, rule and exception, infernal repetition of catastrophe and messianic eruption of the possible. Against a flat and determinist materialism, his ferocious critique of positivism drew on the atomists and their 'subterranean materialism of the encounter'. After having tried to mill the singularity of the event in the powerful wheels of the structuralist machine, Althusser in his final period had himself rediscovered the 'miracle of the *clina-men*'. At the risk, moreover, of giving in to the opposite temptation: that of a fetishism of the event without historicity, the white sheet on which Chairman Mao claimed to draw an absolutely new humanity after his fashion, a tabula rasa on which 'the idealism of liberty' could take its revenge. The politics of revolution then tends to be confused with the theology of revelation.

My curiosity towards the insubmission of Joan of Arc and the medieval millenarianisms whose echo she transmitted, towards the 'Christians without church', the transgressions of Sabbataï Tsevi and Jacob Frank, the impassioned rebels of Canudos and the Christiade, contributed towards awakening a particular sensitivity to the impatience of popular heresies.

The point was, in parallel with a rereading of Marx, to rediscover the categories that would make it possible to face a major crisis of historical time. Without the early resistances to Stalinist counter-revolution, the

darkness of history would in fact have become rigorously desperate. To escape the distress of its implacable logic, the material for future reconstruction had to be seized from the ruins of the century. The Benjaminian concept of history thus reverses the meaning of expectations. We no longer await the messiah. It is we who are awaited. Invested with the 'weak messianic force' of deliverance, it is we who respond to an expectation.³ A new temporality then takes shape, in the dialogue between history and the pagan soul, in the dialectical tension between history and remembering, between the judicial pretensions of the historical tribunal of sinister memory and the uncertainties of memory, between the journalistic tendencies of professional history and the novelistic tendencies of memory, between the empty glance of monumental history and the burning eyes of amorous memory, between the collection mania of antiquarian history and the selective remembrances of a forgetful memory.

The mere flow of a homogeneous duration cannot replace the causal link between what precedes and what follows. The order of succession is not a sufficient order of intelligibility. In order to advance, one must be able to go back. To retreat, the better to leap. To put the past in question. To give yesterday's defeated a new chance. Against ready-made history, 'made in advance', to redeem the 'making itself' of the already made.

The defeated have a long memory. Often, this is all that they do have. It is the only chance left for them to escape being the prey of the winners, and to defy the hellish repetition of defeats. Only their fidelity to subjugated ancestors can still reverse the direction of signs, rescue a tradition threatened by conformism, and the latest fashion of embourgeoisement (which is, quite precisely, a style marked by conformism).

Instrumental rationality has stubbornly set out to empty time of its messianic pregnancy, to dissolve the surprises of the event in the regularities of the clock. It has claimed to disenchant space, reduced to its cold geometric measure. The politics of the event attacks this heavy chain of abstract time. Like love, which similarly lives in the present tense, revolution is then a 'pure and unmixed present', which looks back to the past in order to decipher the forecasts of the possible. With insurrection as with falling in love, today is 'the moment that flies with the speed of an arrow'. As long as it cleaves the air, 'the moment cannot petrify'.

Nor can the weak messianic force be bureaucratised.

The sorry end of the twentieth century will remain a time of ashes, of events with no radiance. The proclaimed death of communism was

in reality no more than the second death of a corpse that had long decomposed. What exactly is this corpse? What void has it left behind? And what if the bureaucratic parasite only disappeared after having gnawed to the bone the body it had laboriously destroyed? That is the ambiguity and the enigma of this death in two stages: no matter how far back you turn, it is no longer possible to evoke a good old time for which to sigh.

We had believed ourselves backed by the reassuring mass of a magic mountain, a kind of protecting Sinai sanctified by divine thunder. As if what had been accomplished was irreversible. As if there was never a need to begin again. As if what had been done was definitive. That was underestimating the power of obliteration and devastation of which Stalinist reaction was the perfected form, powerful to the point of imperilling not only the event of October, but also the very name of Marx, and making its deafening thunder inaudible. Sartre believed, perhaps incautiously, that communism was 'the unsurpassable horizon of our time'. He refused to see the era otherwise than as 'the age of a communist question'. In the 1980s, by a cruel ruse of unreason, capital seemed to have become in its turn the unsurpassable horizon of all time. History threatened to disappear – along with politics, of course – in the desolation of commodity eternity.

It was impossible to continue as if nothing had happened, as if this were simply a temporary eclipse of possibilities, as if everything would ineluctably and fatally become again as it had been. Yet the debacle was bound to surprise us. We had long predicted the deadly asphyxia of a bureaucratic command economy. But we had underestimated its lasting consequences. We had wanted to believe that things would peacefully resume their interrupted course, that the hour of a great socialist renewal would sound, and that history would finally do justice to the last of the just.

We had certainly paid insufficient attention to Engels's warning that 'history does nothing'. Perhaps we had also underestimated what restoration meant. Far more than an annulment, a re-establishment, a return to the starting line. Faced with the restoration of his own time, Hegel consoled himself with the idea that reaction would not even succeed in hoisting itself 'to the laces of giant's boots in order to smear them with a bit of mud', still less to unlace and take off these winged boots. Our own gloomy *fin de siècle* no longer believed enough in illusions of progress and the direction of history to allow itself such theological subterfuges.

What new communism, then, could such collapse and foundering be preparing? The end of history, or the end of its great illusions? The mere erosion of time would not have managed to annihilate the prophetic force of an event of such kind that other resurrecting events will necessarily restore it in the memory of peoples, true as it is that only a beginning is able to hear other beginnings.⁴ This is undoubtedly the secret of the glacial silence that followed the implosion of actually non-existing socialism. It was not a magnificent sunrise, one of those that suddenly light up a morning full of promises, but a twilit agony that does not proclaim any 'new way of beginning'.

We had thus reached the disturbing hour at which the narrow gate of the possible seemed to close. When revolution becomes the name of the inconstant event that has refused to arrive, or – still worse – has appeared in the form of its own rebuttal. Perhaps also that extreme point of disenchantment was the precious moment of broken knowledge and amazement on the basis of which everything again became possible: that of a Proustian awakening, propitious, in the lucid coolness of an uncertain dawn, to a no longer innocent reading of Marx.

A happy event! Good messianic news!

Not like the comfort of some warm inn after a tiring journey. Nor a 'happy end' of universal history, but that of a joyous start in the dew of a sunny morning, of a gate once again open onto other possible worlds.

The event makes a deep gash in the obscure veins of time. Without it, the future would be no more than a drawn-out past, prolonged to eternity, 'dragging itself interminably along the long strategic route of time'.⁵

Since resignation to the immutable order of things has stolen a march on the desire to change it, prophets and messiahs have had a bad press. They have become, in the prosaic celebration of the fait accompli, synonymous with childish fairy-tales at best, and totalitarian aspirations at worst. Despite the usual confusions, however, the ancient prophet was neither a divine, nor a sorcerer, nor a magician. He or she was someone who switched the points of the present into the unknown bifurcations of the future.

In the same way, Marx's historical predictions were not a scientific prognosis, but a project or hypothesis that was always at risk of failure. As distinct from the Greek oracle, this strategic prophecy, like those of the Old Testament, was always conditional.

Borrowed from Blanqui, Proust and Benjamin, the notions of expectation, awakening, rememorising and bifurcation amount to a

new representation of history. They tie the necessity of historical determinations to the contingency of the event, making it possible to grasp on the wing the opportunity of a conjuncture. It is then no longer a question of mythic or religious prophecy, but, in the distinction established by Hermann Broch, of a 'logical prophecy'. An art of balance of forces, mediations and going against the grain.

Political through and through, this secular prophecy is decidedly not a utopia. It harasses the present in the name of threatened tradition. It does not promise a guaranteed future in the form of destiny. It warns in the conditional mood of the probability of a catastrophe that there is still time to forestall.

Things will end up badly, if . . .

But they can (still) be sorted out . . .

The prophet is first of all someone who prevents peaceful sleep. His messianic impatience is an ambush, a watch, a guard, the fully present experience of a proclaimed future that tarries and fails to arrive; the very opposite, therefore, of weariness at the sad repetition of works and days. There is not a moment 'that does not bear within its revolutionary chance', however tiny, fragile and derisory.⁶

Messianic times, when an old order breaks without the new order having yet taken shape, are necessarily out of joint. They are propitious to rumours, wonders, upsurges. Propitious, also, to charlatans, quacks, merchants of potions and illusions. Propitious, finally, to spectral presences and messianic apparitions. This was undoubtedly the secret of Joan of Arc: a passenger, and a passer, between two eras, two sexes, two forms of belief, two practices of war. This was the secret of her spiritual force and her bodily weakness, inextricably mingled:

The past dies and is reborn with each generation. In this age shaken by the powerful currents of the irrational and the unconscious, it is logical that the human spirit feels itself closer to Jeanne d'Arc, in a better position to understand and appreciate her: Jeanne has returned to us, carried by the swell of our own storm.⁷

It was also the secret of Saint-Just's melancholy, his silence and muteness, when he understood that the necessary and the possible were no longer conjoined.

When current affairs again take the upper hand, when the bad folds of habit return, when the embourgeoisified revolution establishes itself in the trappings of the republic, when the flame of the event becomes

bureaucratic cinders, heroes and messiahs collapse with fatigue, the red-eyed sentinels on watch tend to sigh. They experience in their turn a crushing lassitude, like that which seized Vigny's Moses on the threshold of Canaan. The lassitude of Joan of Arc, flat on the ground, crushed by her armour, beneath the closed gates of Compiègne. That of Uriel da Costa, putting his elegant pistol to his temple and leaving the community of rabbis with the burden of his blasphemous suicide. That of Saint-Just, walled in the definitive silence of the Thermidorean night. That of defiant Guevara, in a remote Bolivian schoolyard, against the killer who had arrived to dispatch him. These solitary lassitudes are melancholy, as the doors of the possible swing shut.

Before Orleans, Joan already knew, and said, that she would last out 'a year, hardly more'. So she was in a hurry. She burned with the consuming impatience of heretics. As George Steiner put it, 'Heresy is also a form of impatience'.

My three books from this time, *Moi, la Révolution*, *Jeanne de Guerre lasse* and *Walter Benjamin, sentinelle messianique*, seem a long way from Marx. As their dates attest, it was a question of a parallel track, the better to return to the question of communism via the byway of heresies, the detour of messianic rationality, the steep path of a logic of the event.

In the name of factual connections, the historian's history, servant of the fait accompli, exonerates the Thermidoreans from their responsibilities. Instead of resigning itself to the idea that what is was fated to be, strategic history seeks to deploy the bundle of possibilities that each conjuncture contains.

I shall never hymn a woman or tell a story,
 I shall not speak of sighs at nightfall or the landscape seen from
 my window,
 I shall not give out sleeping draughts or suicide notes,
 I shall not flee to the islands, nor let myself be carried away by
 seraphins.
 Time is my subject
 The present time and present men
 Present life.*

* 'Não serei o cantor de uma mulher, de uma história, / Não direi os suspiros ao anoitecer, a paisagem vista da janela, / Não distribuirei entorpecentes nem cartas de suicida, / Não fugirei para as ilhas, nem serei raptado por serafins. / O tempo é a minha matéria, / O tempo presente os homens presentes, / A vida presente.' (Carlos Drummond).

A Thousand (and One) Marxisms

What is a theory for, if not to preserve the practice of the possible?

— Paul Valéry

Who are the Marxists today, and what does inheriting mean? Inheritance is not a material good, wealth that is received and put in the bank; inheritance is an active and selective affirmation, which sometimes may be reanimated and reaffirmed more by illegitimate heirs than by the legitimate ones; in other words, political commitment today involves the question of knowing what one will make of this inheritance, how one will put it to work.

— Jacques Derrida, *Marx en jeu*

‘It will be long,’ the prophet Jeremiah proclaimed.

After the urgent agitation of the 1980s, it was clear that this would be the case. We were entering a suffocating period of intellectual stagflation. The time had come to arm oneself with slow impatience, to shore up the foundations and (re)read Marx. Not a second-hand Marx, filtered by illustrious readers. But a Marx in the text, ‘writing something red in black on white’.¹ To reread him not to undertake an umpteenth return, but to remain faithful to him by learning to resist him. Not to oppose the authentic original to its counterfeits, but to break the bind that imprisons the greater part of his words, and release the ‘thousand Marxisms’ from the tyranny of orthodoxy. This meant subjecting the legacy to the test of a world that fragmented at the same time as it globalised, of new imperial dominations and ambiguous identities, of ecological and bioethical challenges, and participatory democracy in the age of the communications revolution.

A work lives from its inherent contradictions and the interpretations that it authorizes. Unravelling the intricacies of Marx’s words,

Maurice Blanchot stressed the 'disparate' that holds these discourses together, without Marx always managing to accommodate to 'the plurality of languages that collide in him'.²

During the 1980s, against winds and tides, I devoted the greater part of my lectures to readings of Marx, ploughing through *Capital*, the *Grundrisse* and *Theories of Surplus-Value* with the help of a group of valiant students.³ These sessions were open to working students, and were held mainly in the evenings. As classical philosophy had the wind in its sails at this time, the participants in this untimely task were so few in number that it took the form of a seminar rather than a magisterial discourse. A dozen nationalities were sometimes gathered here: Turks, Kurds, Greeks, Cypriots, Chileans, Iranians, Malians, Congolese, Spaniards, Germans, Italians, Americans, Mexicans, Algerians, Tunisians and Haitians. A whole philosophizing diaspora, of exiles and migrants. The little band sometimes continued discussion at a Chinese café in the Îlot Chalon, not yet rehabilitated.

If I sometimes left reluctantly for the university of Saint-Denis, still suffering from its Vincennes nostalgia, I returned in good spirits. Sharing knowledge is a healthy principle of reality and humility. Teaching involves learning. I performed this public service with pleasure. But the urgency was elsewhere. Always in a hurry, I did not take the time to attend the lectures of my colleagues. As if everyone feared reopening political wounds that had not well healed, our cordial relations scarcely went beyond courteous coexistence.⁴ What treasures, however, were to be found in the lectures of Deleuze, Schérer, Badiou and Rancière (without going back any further to the tutelary figure of François Châtelet, a genial colossus, to whom this philosophy department was greatly indebted for its survival).

To prepare my lectures, I took notes in large cardboard-bound notebooks. By the end of the decade, I had accumulated a large sum of raw material, without the intention of publication. Edwy Plenel pressed me to speak to Olivier Bétourné, editorial director at Fayard. In these years, 1993–94, Marx was hardly riding high on the conceptual hit parade. *Newsweek* had proclaimed his final demise. Academic bien-pensants treated him as a dead dog. Without any great illusion, I presented a plan in three volumes (no less!) and three critiques: 1) Critique of historical reason; 2) Critique of sociological reason; 3) Critique of scientific positivism. To my surprise, Olivier Bétourné had the courage to read these bulging manuscripts, and agreed to

publish them together in one volume, if I could cut several thousands of words.⁵ I emerged from the interview ready to set to work, but perplexed as to the possibility of carrying out such a radical amputation.

The solution arose in an unexpected way. Marc Perelman, an impassioned publisher specializing in books on urbanism and the rescue of heterodox classics of Marxism, had asked me for a selection of articles for his Éditions de la Passion. We agreed that the suppressed sections of *Marx l'intempestif* would serve as material for a separate book, titled *La Discordance des temps*. This was how the twin volumes took shape. They appeared simultaneously in autumn 1995, at the very moment when the great strikes on the issues of social security and public service were beginning, and when, at the initiative of Jacques Bidet and *Actuel Marx*, the first Marx International congress was held. These coincidences attracted the attention of critics: 'Marx: the return?'

Marx? But which among the revenant spectres?

At the end of the nineteenth century, the reception of Marx's work was the issue in opposing strategies of reading. Their confrontation aroused recurrent crises of 'Marxism' in the singular. This crystallized around one pole insisting on the role of revolutionary subjectivity, while the opposite pole fell into a historical or structural determinism. This confrontation did indeed express an unresolved tension within Marx's own theory.

In Germany, his reception was largely determined by the authority of the direct heirs, in particular that of Kautsky, upholder of the vulgar Darwinist philosophy in vogue in the early twentieth century. Of the complex concept of development, he kept only 'development as objective historical becoming in nature and society'. Subsequent readings of Marx suffered heavily from these simplifications, taken over by Stalinist 'Diamat' and its representation of a universal history with a single direction.

Aggravated by difficulties of translation and publishing, the truncated reception of Marx in France fell under the aegis of the positivist ideology hegemonic in the academic and political institutions of the Third Republic. It was this unlikely marriage that gave birth to an 'undiscoverable Marxism' à la française.⁶

With its train of economic crises and political defeats – from the German revolution interrupted in 1923 to the Nazi-Soviet pact of 1939, by way of the victory of fascism in Italy and Nazism in Germany,

the crushing of the second Chinese revolution, the Spanish civil war and the bureaucratic counter-revolution in the Soviet Union – the wave of recession between the two world wars deeply marked positions within the international workers' movement. The main debates then bore on the dynamic of the world economy, the strategic confrontation between a state reformism and the 'lessons of October', the united front against fascism and alliances in the context of the popular fronts, the colonial revolution in Asia and the Thermidorean reaction in the Soviet Union. This period of regression was sealed by the institutionalization of an official state Marxism in the Soviet Union and the crystallization of an orthodoxy refractory to the offerings of psychoanalysis or surrealism, both condemned at the time of the Kharkov writers' congress.⁷

The intellectual reaction then dug an irreducible fracture between the 'warm' and 'cold' currents of Marxism. The latter adjusted to an insipid propaganda discourse, the canons of which were fixed by the immortal booklet of the Little Father of the Peoples, *Historical and Dialectical Materialism*. The former took inspiration from the multiple dissidences that contributed to the survival of a critical Marxism: the Lukács of *History and Class Consciousness*, the Gramsci of the *Prison Notebooks*, as well as Karl Korsch, Isaak I. Rubin, Christian Rakovsky, Henryk Grossmann, Pierre Naville and many others. Stalinist scholasticism was propagated all the more easily in that it had behind it a powerful *raison d'état*, it followed on from the dominant vulgate of the Second International, and a major part of Marx's work was still unknown.⁸

When midnight rang out in the century, undaunted rebels stubbornly wagered on an improbable immanent justice of history, as if to conjure away the imminent catastrophe. The impostors would eventually be unmasked. Some people believed that the political defeats of the time could be explained by a vexing 'delay' of consciousness in relation to 'objective conditions', which were ripe to the point of beginning to rot.⁹ In 1923, however, Karl Korsch had already denounced the perverse consequences of a scientistic reading of Marx: the divorce between a theory petrified into positive science, on the one hand, and a philosophy cast into the ideological shadows on the other. This mutilation paved the way for a lasting separation between a science rigidified into authoritarian dogma and a wretched philosophy of party apologia. The shattering determinism of an instrumental science of the social, coupled with a speculative philoso-

phy of history, was indeed the sign of a farewell to Marx's own dialectical critique. A new union became necessary.

After the Second World War, the expansion of the 'golden age' led to a new turnaround in the practices and representations of the social movement. In particular, it stimulated studies of 'neocapitalism' and its disconcerting dynamism.¹⁰ At the same time, the developmental perspectives of a decolonized Third World inspired both radical Third Worldist theses (such as those of Frantz Fanon) and a distrust towards the privileged egoism of 'labour aristocracies' that indirectly shared the fruits of colonial pillage. Finally, the shock wave of Hiroshima, and the recognition of Stalin's crimes in Khrushchev's 1956 report, aroused in the Marxian milieu a new rise of interest in ethical questions. The passionate polemics on existentialism and humanism bear witness to this.

Yet the interwar split between theory and practice had in no way been resolved. It encouraged on the one hand scientific and technocratic tendencies, and on the other hand an abstract radicalism and a utopia of abundance, demanding 'everything right away'. The European social arousal of the 1960s, however, heralded by the Belgian strikes of winter 1961–62, the mass strikes in Italy and the miners' strikes in France, made it possible to renew the ties between social struggles and theoretical debates. This thaw found an expression in publishing, thanks to the dynamism of such independents as François Maspero in France and Feltrinelli in Italy. After long being banned, a heterodox Marxist literature once again surfaced. A start was made in reappropriating a memory that had long been confiscated. In the early 1970s, for example, Perry Anderson could proclaim the exhaustion of the philosophical and aesthetic tradition of a 'Western Marxism' that, in order to defend its autonomy in the face of a politics sequestered by orthodox ideological apparatuses, had taken refuge in peripheral domains less exposed to bureaucratic censorship.¹¹

Inaugurating the downward turn of the world economy's long wave, the recession of 1973–74 formed the prelude to the neoliberal offensive of Thatcher and Reagan. The reflux of social struggles then raised new questions as to the reality of the proletariat and its emancipatory vocation. The 'social question' was pushed back into the corridors of the academic and publishing scene, in favour of classical political philosophy. The paradigms of justice and communication gained the upper hand over that of production, the culture of

consensus over that of conflict.¹² The jargon of postmodernity had the wind in its sails. The dividing line between capitalism and socialism, imperialism and liberation struggles, faded to the benefit of the ideological cleavage between totalitarianism and human rights.

Marxist studies, now on the defensive, felt the growing influence of methodological individualism, game theory, and the formalist jargon of equity. This tendency was particularly marked in the current of 'analytic Marxism', important in the English-speaking countries but relatively marginal in those of Latin culture. The neoliberal counter-reform, on the other hand, triggered a new interest in questions long left fallow or dismissed by French philosophical Marxism. The question of 'economic rhythms' that had been heatedly discussed in the 1930s by Kondratiev, Schumpeter, Henryk Grossmann and Trotsky, had been so long forgotten that the long postwar expansion was able to give the illusion of a capitalism whose contradictions had been mastered by Fordist regulation, and a growth that was now continuous, regular and unlimited.¹³ It arose with new force in the early 1980s.

In a sequel to his little book on Western Marxism of 1976, Perry Anderson still considered in 1983 that France, Germany and Italy were countries where a critical Marxism had been able to survive.* But despite the contribution of the Frankfurt school, the retreat meant a return to classical philosophical concerns at the expense of social critique. With the damage caused by the media eruption of the 'new philosophers', Paris had become in his eyes 'the capital of ideological reaction in Europe'.

Gilles Deleuze had a clear view of the matter right from the start. The real novelty of the 'new philosophers', he said, was to have 'introduced philosophical and literary marketing into France', and, 'living off corpses', to have built their career on a martyrology. Thus they heralded the triumphant necrophagy of the *Black Book of Communism* or the Dostoyevskian tribulations of André Glucksmann in Manhattan.† Their loudly proclaimed 'novelty' remained at bottom blandly conformist: 'Nothing living gets by them, but they will have fulfilled their function if they hold the stage long enough to kill off everything.' And Deleuze concluded: 'This is the negation of all politics.'¹⁴ That was far-sighted and clear.

* *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism.*

† A reference to Glucksmann's book on the September 11 attacks, *Dostoïevski à Manhattan* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2002).

The intellectual and moral bankruptcy of a major section of the left intelligentsia, in both France and Italy, favoured the shift in the centre of gravity of political theory to the English-speaking countries, long viewed – not without condescension – as the terrain of a pragmatism lacking in scope. While the ‘three sources of Marxism’ presented in Lenin’s didactic article had not stopped playing hide and seek on the old continent for more than half a century, without ever reaching the proclaimed synthesis, the focus of critique seemed in this way to have returned to the centre of world capitalist accumulation.

Contrary to the expectations of Perry Anderson, the blows that the neoliberal offensive dealt the workers’ movement forced ‘Anglo-Saxon Marxism’ in its turn to a philosophical and aesthetic retreat.¹⁵ Conversely, in France philosophical Marxism lost ground in favour of critical sociology and economics. The new intellectual generation was formed in the 1980s in response to the slow renewal of social movements.

In the English-speaking world, the element of renewal came more from what has been defined as ‘political Marxism’. This pleonasm denoted an anti-determinist research programme on the transition from feudalism to capitalism, illustrated in particular by the works of Robert Brenner and Ellen Meiksins Wood. It was used in a pejorative sense by the French historian Guy Bois, who criticized Brenner for giving an excessive role and autonomy to the class struggle as against the supposed laws of historical development. Despite appearances, this quarrel was anything but academic. It had echoes of the great controversies of the 1930s on the opposition between ‘permanent revolution’ and ‘revolution by stages’, multilinear or unilinear historical development, the question of the ‘Asiatic mode of production’, and, more generally, the conflict between a positivist and a strategic Marxism.

Once again, therefore, between cold and warm currents.

A major contribution of Anglo-Saxon Marxism to the debate on Marxisms has been its critique of postmodernism. As distinct from the rhetoric developed by Jean-François Lyotard or Jean Baudrillard, the works of Fredric Jameson, David Harvey, Alex Callinicos and Terry Eagleton are explicitly located in the lineage of a critical Marxism. Jameson’s reference to Ernest Mandel’s *Late Capitalism* attests to his concern to link ‘the cultural logic of late capitalism’ to a rigorous periodisation of modes of capital accumulation. The challenge presented by this discussion may be met in different ways.

Either by defensively insisting on a pseudo-orthodox doctrine, for which postmodernism is reduced to a pale reflection of the spirit of the time, or a more or less sophisticated acclimatisation of the dominant neoliberal ideology. Or, on the contrary, by accepting the interpellations that the controversy bears, without for all that abandoning the legacy of a critical Marxism, and that of the Enlightenment, even if somewhat muted.

With the social metamorphoses and political confusion of the end of the century, schools of thought that were influential only recently have disintegrated. In a 1987 survey, Robert Boyer already acknowledged the impasses of the so-called regulation school, divided between a managerial tendency and the search for an undiscoverable 'ecological paradigm'.

The 'analytical Marxism' school did not resist the 1990s any more successfully. At best, the formalism of 'rational choice' remained silent in the face of the first signs of new social mobilisation and challenge to commodity globalisation; at worst, it brought grist to the mill of a modernising sector of the trade-union movement and its apologia for an enlightened social partnership. Torn from the very start between a dynamic conception of class struggle and a methodological individualism, the two things being scarcely compatible, this current ended up accepting its own dispersion; certain of its leading representatives openly acknowledged their break with any remnants of Marxist inspiration.

Finally, the Italian *operaismo* current, illustrated in the 1960s by the works of Mario Tronti and Toni Negri, also failed to survive the changes in work, industrial fragmentation and the defeats experienced by the big industrial battalions (the British miners, the French steelworkers, and the car workers in Italy). A disappointed *operaismo* then collapsed into what Tronti described as a 'theoretical despair', or else the search for new philosophical resources (particularly in Deleuze and Foucault), leading it to take a growing distance from the critique of political economy.

Considering the renewal of Marxist research in the last decade, the theoretical sterility of the official Communist movement is particularly striking. Creativity is being reborn on the margins, among outsiders and heterodox dissidents.¹⁶ Marx's research programme remains fertile, in fact, on condition of not being satisfied with an academic production, but engaging in dialogue with the renewed practices of social movements. It is here that the actuality of the critique of capital is manifest, a critique of the bewitchment of

commodity modernity, the privatisation of the world, and the deathly rush to the conquest of new spaces of accumulation. This critique was born in the nineteenth century, in the age of Victorian globalisation, the rise of the railway, telegraph, and steam shipping. In due proportion, this great transformation was the equivalent of today's revolution in telecommunications and biotechnology. Then, as now, there was a prodigious development of speculation, with its trail of resounding scandals and bankruptcies, while the 'industry of massacre' and the colonisation of the world prospered.¹⁷

Confronted with the challenges of the new century, the blossoming of 'a thousand Marxisms'¹⁸ demolishes the myth of a homogeneous doctrine, cutting through history like a steel blade. If it is possible to speak of 'Marxism' in the singular, this should rather be viewed as an archipelago of controversies, conjectures, refutations and experiences, whose history it relates by elucidating the mysteries and prodigies of capital.

This non-doctrinaire critical theory is constantly fuelled by social struggles and practices whose impersonal logic it unravels. The question then is to know whether there still exists, in this ticklish plurality of a thousand Marxisms, a common denominator that can justify the generic name they still claim. Too generous a proliferation of 'Marxisms' could in fact lead to their dissolution pure and simple, in a cultural broth lacking heuristic vigour or practical pertinence.

A theory proves its vitality by the fruitfulness of the controversies it arouses. It is inseparable from the history of its receptions. If it has the mission of 'preserving the usage of the possible', not all interpretations are permitted for all that, at the risk of falling into a dogmatic eclecticism. A critical theory of the social world cannot mutate into a state ideology and rationale. It has constantly to defend itself from the misconceptions and impostures committed in its name, to continuously shift and verify its own contours and boundaries. What could there be in common between the Marxism of Enver Hoxha and that of Trotsky? Between that of Georges Marchais – or Robert Hue – and that of Gramsci?*

* Georges Marchais, 1920–97, an engineering worker, called up to work in Germany during the Occupation years, under the provisions of the 22 October 1942 conscription law. Held various trade union positions from 1946 onwards. In the PCF from 1947, joining the central committee and politburo in 1959. He became secretary for organisation, replacing pro-Khrushchev representatives. He led a campaign against the 'gauchistes' ('ultra-leftists') in 1968. General secretary of the PCF from 1972 to 1994, oscillating between different levels of closeness to the USSR and unity with the French Socialists.

The branching of these 'thousand Marxisms' thus appears as a propitious moment of liberation, when thought pierces its shell and breaks the carapace of doctrine to take new flight. It attests to the possibility of beginning anew. At the start of the 1990s, the necrophagic mainstream press announced the good news of the death of Marx. A bizarre death, all the more noisily proclaimed as this funeral tumult was designed to spirit away the possibility of the spectre's return. What journalist would dream, without risking ridicule, to proclaim on the front page the death of Plato, Spinoza or Hegel? These eternal survivors have a tenacious posterity. All the more so does the untimely Marx. If he was fully of his own time, he is also of ours. For he follows the trace of capital, the assassin of society whose profile he drew with such genius, like a shadow. That is why, as Derrida said, there will be no future without Marx.

With or against him, perhaps. But not without him.

Robert Hue, born 1946, a psychiatric nurse and judo champion. Joined the Jeunesse Communiste in 1962. Mayor of Montigny-lès-Cormeilles, in 1981 he led a rowdy demonstration against a family of Moroccan immigrants in his commune whom he had baselessly denounced as drug dealers. An MP, MEP, and senator. Elected to the PCF central committee in 1987, its general secretary from 1994 and its president 2001–03. Having attempted to reform the PCF, he left in 2009 to create the Mouvement Unitaire Progressiste, supporting François Hollande.

The Inaudible Thunder

When *Capital* interrupts the course of the whole historic movement, tearing its fabric, it is like an inaudible thunderclap, a silence, a margin.

— Gérard Granel, preface to Husserl,
La Crise des sciences européennes

For more than ten years we bent our ears to this silence. And we have certainly not stopped deciphering its echoes.

In his correspondence with Ruge, the young Marx set as his goal 'critical mockery' instead of 'holy excommunication'. He held to this programme of steadily stripping away illusions. Critique (of political economy) was not a new doctrine, but a rupture, in both theory and practice, with the speculative philosophies that were satisfied with interpreting the world without seeking to transform it. It refused to freeze the intelligence of the real in the hypostases of a science that claimed to speak truth about truth. A kind of negative science, it never says its last word. At best, it leads thought to the threshold of struggle, from which it can take strategic flight.

What did Marx have in mind, and how? He penetrated the spirit of capital in order to abolish its diabolical logic from within. The heart of his critique is *Capital*. Inescapable, always uncompleted, constantly recommenced, it is an unending project.¹

In the beginning was the commodity. Spinoza began with God; Marx began with 'the elementary form of wealth'. Beginnings are always difficult. The first requirement is to avoid the crude pitfalls of origin and chronology. The commodity appears then as point of departure for an investigation of the mysteries of capitalist accumulation, of the value automaton whose value automatically increases, of money that makes money, the immaculate conception and parthenogenesis of capital that engenders itself.

The first move must be to break the shell of this mystical and duplicitous thing: the commodity. A strange world of dialectical couples emerges from it, as if from a magician's hat: use-value and exchange-value, concrete labour and abstract labour, constant and variable capital, fixed and circulating capital, etc. It is in this way that the common measure of the world of familiar but disparate objects, at first sight incommensurable, is revealed: this 'something in common, that shows itself in exchange-value', and that is nothing other than 'materialized human labour'.

If the commodity exerts a strange power of fascination, this is because it is haunted by the life that it holds captive within it. Contrary to appearances, it is not in fact something inert and subjugated, dumbly utilitarian, but 'a determinate social relation that assumes the fantastic form of a relationship between things'. From the confused swarm of commodities that jostle one another on the busy marketplace, strutting their stuff in the shop-window and ogling the customer with a glad eye, one emerges in which all can recognise and see themselves, their general equivalent, the merciless leveller that abolishes every distinction and transforms a Verdurin into a Guermantes: money that 'cries out its desire'.

The commodity phantasmagoria is then at its zenith. The Sabbath of fetishes is in full swing.

To understand the stupefying miracles by which wealth, not content just to circulate, grows, swells and prospers, we have to 'leave this noisy sphere, where everything takes place on the surface and in full view of everyone', to shadow the protagonists in a fools' bargain, the one who possesses capital and the other who possesses only labour-power. We have to follow them in 'the hidden abode of production, on whose threshold there hangs the notice "No admittance except on business".' The one with coins in his pocket leads the way. The other who sells muscles and skill follows in resignation, head down, 'like someone who has brought his own hide to market and now has nothing else to expect but – a tanning'.

These disturbing catacombs, where the alchemy of surplus-value is effected, the transubstantiation of labour into capital, are the scene of a primordial crime. Here life is indeed spent in limbo, from the living skin to the skin dead and tanned. Led into the cellars below the market, the worker, stripped of all individuality, is now simply

* Karl Marx, *Capital* Volume I (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p. 280.

'personified labour-time' or 'a body of time'. Following the worker in his descent to the torture garden, we discover a detailed martyrology: 'physiological degeneration', occupational diseases, adulterated goods, all the physical and mental mutilations inherent in the discipline of forced labour. The relationship of exploitation and domination becomes the stake in a struggle that will never end.

After the determinations of the production process introduced in Volume 1, Volume 2 develops those specific to the process of circulation. The question here is no longer simply to elucidate the mystery of surplus-value, but to discover the way in which this is realised. The continuity of the production process, in fact, depends on the respective rhythms of rotation of industrial capital, commercial capital and monetary capital. In circulation, the play of appearances and disappearances of these forms is unravelled, that of their metamorphoses 'until the commodity is finally consumed'. The circular temporality of exchange is thus superimposed on the linear temporality of production.

Volume 1 pierces the secret of surplus-value. Volume 2 reveals the manner in which this is realised through alienation. Its transfiguration into profit forms the centre of Volume 3, on 'the process of capitalist production as a whole', or the process of reproduction. It is only here that the concrete forms appear that are generated by 'the movement of capital considered as a whole'. The critique of political economy thereby turns out to be both a logic and an aesthetic of the concept, going 'right to the internal unease of everything that exists'.

In its overall architecture, *Capital* presents itself as a contradictory organisation of social times. Marx did pioneering work here. To conceive the economy of time, into which in the last instance the whole of political economy resolves, it is necessary first of all to forge the conceptual categories relating to the time factor: cycle, rotation, process.² For this, Marx takes up the Aristotelian reciprocal determination of time and movement. Value is measured by the socially necessary labour-time necessary for the reproduction and maintenance of labour-power. Determined by concrete technical and historical conditions, this time cannot be its own measure. The unit of measure must itself be measured. Social time and the movement of capital therefore mutually determine one another. Measured and measuring, time becomes at the same time the standard and the relation of value. Dynamic and ungraspable, this value is continuously modified with the social conditions of its production. Prodigiously

mystical, it thus behaves as an instrument of measurement that varies with the object measured.

The 'double existence' of the commodity bears within it the permanent risk of intimate scission. The germ of crises is thus contained in money as autonomous form of value. The temporal separation of the acts of purchase and sale, which have become forms 'spatially and temporally indifferent', dissociated from one another, establishes discord between production and circulation, the surplus-value extracted and the surplus-value realised: 'Their immediate identity ceases.' Consumption then becomes madness, but 'madness as a moment of the economy determining the life of peoples', as Marx wrote in the *Grundrisse*.

This madness dominates the life of nations more than ever. This is the secret of the 'structural violences' that ravage the best of possible commodity worlds. Armed violence is only the extreme and spectacular manifestation of this.

Crisis is the sudden manifestation of this malaise. The broken unity of 'moments that are endowed with autonomy in relation to one another' can then only be restored by force and violence.³ Understood in this perspective, actual crises are not simply economic. They are political and moral crises, crises of civilisation, inscribed in the contradictions internal to the law of value. The reduction of everything, including the social relation itself, to abstract labour-time, grows increasingly wretched and irrational with the increased socialisation of labour and the incorporation of a growing part of intellectual labour in the labour process. The crisis is then tragically manifested by massive phenomena of exclusion and unemployment, as well as by the inability of the market to regulate in the long run the relationship of the human species to its natural conditions of existence and reproduction.⁴

It is inextricably a social, ecological and moral crisis.

It places on the agenda the overthrow of the existing order, without guaranteeing for all that the conditions of possibility of the other world that is necessary. Destruction and construction do not immediately coincide.

The actuality of the revolution, however, is that of 'revolution in permanence'. This is the conclusion that Marx drew from the abortive revolutions of 1848. They proclaimed what humanity was now historically capable of resolving, without the certainty of arriving. The only compass in this uncertain work is to take the part of the

oppressed, even in defeat if need be. This ethic of action does not admit calculations of opportunity or punctuality; untimely by nature, revolutions do not bend to the schemas of a metahistory outside of time. Their event escapes the arbitrary arrangements of grand narratives of universal history. They arise at ground level, in the miseries of the present.

For the present is the temporal pivot of this barely open door. It is the specific time of a political action, without divine sanction, that now drives history. It is a prophetic time par excellence, which defies the fatality of catastrophes proclaimed.

They are certain if, and only if . . . on condition that . . .

But it is still possible to spirit them away.

'Historical necessity' thus proclaims what should be, but will not necessarily be. For this necessity is indissociable from its share of contingency. As early as his doctoral thesis on Democritus and Epicurus, Marx adopted the dialectic according to which effective possibility determines relative necessity. It is inscribed in the play of the necessary and the contingent, in the movement that goes from formal necessity to real necessity by way of relative necessity. For Marx, 'thinker of the possible',⁵ necessity indicates the horizon of a struggle in which the dice defy divinatory predictions. The negation of the negation is then no longer the last word of history, nor its closure. It operates only by way of the concrete play of mediations, singularities, conjunctures and situations.⁶

Contrary to a common misconception, therefore, Marx was not the last great philosopher of history. He was rather, before Nietzsche and Benjamin, a pioneer of the critique of historical reason. The singular figures of the event are now written and erased on the shifting sand of possibilities. Prey to the fetishism of a ventriloquist history, Arthur Koestler's Rubashov, like Merleau-Ponty's Bukharin, had not 'reflected on the idea of a dialectical history'.⁷ If history has neither a predetermined end nor a last judgement, who will be right at the end of the day? Who is the judge? The 'meaning of history' is decidedly not a very certain one. From time to time, it is illuminated by the event. Revolution then appears as the 'sublime point' where the formal antinomies between the singular and the plural, the subject and the object, facts and values, are resolved in the brilliance of the light.

This point belongs to the order of messianic interruption, not that of mechanical time. From Marx to Trotsky, permanent revolution

thus welds together event and history, moment and duration, rupture and continuity. Merleau-Ponty asked whether this was not a final ruse of historical reason, a last avatar of speculative philosophy, the index of a failed escape from religious or sacred history. The genetic idea of 'transcrescence' or 'growing over', in which each stage of development already contains the germ of its successor, can give credence to this suspicion. To escape the sequels of an ideal history in the form of a golden legend, the 'chapter of bifurcations'⁸ has to be worked on, at the grating juncture of history and event. It is necessary, as de Heauviette said of Péguy, to seize the day that is not the same thing as yesterday, 'since there is always one day in life that is not the same thing as always'. This is indeed the mystery of the event, which arises neither by magic nor by miracle.

Marx was no more a sociologist of social classes than he was a philosopher of history. His critique of political economy is also a critique of the sociological reason born under the auspices of positivism. One might seek in vain in his writings for formal definitions and categories of classification. Disconcerted by this absence, many readers believed they could detect a damaging confusion between sociology and economics, or between science and philosophy.⁹ But it is precisely because Marx did not proceed by way of static definitions that the question of classes could only be the object of a specific chapter in the third volume of *Capital*, that on production as a whole.

No sociology of classes, then, no 'socio-professional' ordering or classification, but rather a critical theory of social relations. This is deployed by way of the critique of political economy and by political intervention. The concept of class thus becomes a strategic one. To conceive classes as great mythical subjects would mean falling back into fetishistic illusions and 'the fiction of society as person'. Scorning those who 'with a word, make a thing', Marx rejects both the abstract pre-existence of classes before the individuals that compose them, and a methodological individualism that extracts the individual from the social relation that constitutes his or her singularity. No one is thus less of a sociologist and less of a statistician than he was. *Capital* as a whole is indeed the non-sociological exposé of class relations and class struggle.

The first determination of these relations opposes the global capitalist entrepreneur to the worker forced to sell his labour-time in the struggle over the limitation of the working day. There are then a number of mediations to pursue in order to get from simple

production, the organ of capital despite itself, to the class conceived as 'political class'. Volume 1 in fact keeps to an abstract grasp of the class relation as the immediate relation of exploitation that determines the labour-time socially necessary for the production of value.

Volume 2 tackles the unity between production and circulation. Classes appear here in a wage and money relationship of the purchase and sale of labour-power. The establishment of this relationship presupposes that the conditions of use of labour-power have been separated from its possessor as the property of another. The circulation process thus presents itself as a succession of acts of purchase and sale. The antagonism here is not manifested directly, in the form of a struggle over labour-time, but rather that of the conflictual negotiation of the price of labour-power on the labour market.

It is only in the third volume of *Capital*, that on production as a whole, that the class struggle can logically be deployed in a systematic manner. Then and only then do classes appear concretely, and no longer simply as abstract skeletal supports of social relations, or as a sum of individuals fulfilling analogous functions or enjoying similar status. For 'the average rate of profit depends on the degree of exploitation of total labour by total capital'. This is how capitalists constitute, despite their mutual competition, 'a kind of freemasonry vis-à-vis the whole of the working class'.

'What is it then that constitutes a class?' The question could only be posed at the end of a patient path from the abstract to the concrete. Contrary to positive sociology, which seeks to treat 'social facts' as things, Marx conceives these always as relations and relationships. He does not fix a static object of observation. He pursues the intrinsic logic of its 'multiple determinations'.

Beyond the three volumes of *Capital*, therefore, classes could receive new determinations, by introducing the role of the state, the family, the world market or the educational system. The book on the state, initially envisaged but then abandoned, thus represented the vanishing trace of an incomparable theory. Marx's death, with his manuscript unfinished and the chapter on classes in particular uncompleted, cannot have been the only obstacle.

The confrontation between political parties expresses the reality of the class struggle in a mystified form, at the same time as dissimulating it. Over and above the different forms of social existence and property there arises in fact 'a whole superstructure of illusions, impressions, ways of thinking'. It is necessary therefore to learn to

distinguish the phraseology and claims of parties from their real interests; what they imagine themselves to be from what they actually are. A theory of suspicion, this has been called. Critical theory does indeed present a certain affinity with psychoanalysis and linguistics: political representation is not the adequate reflection of a social nature, nor is class struggle the surface mirroring of a hidden essence. Articulated as a language, it operates by way of displacements and condensations, of revealing jokes and slips of the tongue. It has also its dreams and nightmares.

From the time that the means of production confront the workers as a foreign power, capital stands before them as an alienated and autonomous social force, 'a thing opposed to society'. It stands up like a great tyrannical subject, with the producers being its functional members and limbs. The law of value, which imposes itself on them in the guise of a natural law, then generates 'a real religion of everyday life'.

By what miracle can the alienated and subjugated proletariat, mutilated physically and mentally, ravaged by competition on the labour market, free itself from the sorcery of this enchanted world? That is the decisive question! It is precisely because social relations are not things, but relations of force and conflicts, that classes do not exist statistically, outside of the dialectic of struggles and resistances in which their consciousness is forged. It is also why, contrary to current mystifications, struggle is not play.

The oppressed do not choose to play. They are condemned to struggle at the risk of being crushed. This vital obligation, the impossibility of withdrawing from the game, prohibits transposing the social conflict into the formalism of game theory. What is involved is a merciless hand-to-hand combat, with neither beginning nor end, whose rules vary according to the strength of the protagonists. In all rigour, the logic of capital and methodological individualism are thus incompatible, given that abstract labour and value are from the very start social forms of exploited labour.

Often accused on the one hand of practising a vulgar determinism, Marx is also criticised from the opposite side of lacking the scientific requirements of predictability and refutability. He was certainly gripped by the desire to constitute a science, inspired by a hegemonic scientific ideal. Fascinated by the prodigious results of physics, organic chemistry, geology and thermodynamics, he drew from these the models for his critique of political economy. The commodity

form thus becomes the 'cell form' of the economy, and 'the natural laws of production' are sometimes said to impose themselves 'with iron necessity'. But even if seduced by the success of the 'English science' of economics, Marx remained under the spell of the sirens of 'German science', in which the voices of Leibniz, Goethe and Hegel still echoed. Precariously balancing on the sharp point of critique, his thought tended towards a kind of organic mechanism, that 'science of margins and performances' which Husserl would still call for a century later.

Marx's 'science' is a disconcerting one. In a dialectical logic, in which the order of the concept is embodied in the corporeal order of struggle, it constantly – in a very Pascean play of double inclusion – grasps the subject in the object, sees objectivity in the form of inter-individual relations, articulates structural universality and historic singularities. The literary style of *Capital* has sometimes aroused sarcasm: too over-written to be rigorous! But Marx explicitly demanded this aesthetics of theory as a necessary dimension of knowledge.¹⁰ His metaphorical creativity expressed the concern for a new knowledge both analytical and synthetic, scientific and critical, theoretical and practical.

Despite this, it is not a question of opposing to Marx the scientist, as imagined by his hasty detractors, a Marx as precursor of the scientific revolutions of the twentieth century, from quantum mechanics to chaos theory. His thinking developed under the constraint of a specific, living, bewitched object – capital, whose immanent logic demands a different idea of causality from the mere mechanical, other laws than those of classical physics, a different temporality from that of a mechanical, homogeneous and empty time. In short, a different way of doing science. Recourse to 'German science' signalled both the need for this and the lack.

What in actual fact is a historical necessity? Spinoza would have said a 'free necessity', Leibniz an 'inclining necessity'. A 'tendential law' constantly opposed by its 'internal contradictions', said Marx. This singular necessity has contingency wedded to it.¹¹

Clearly Marx could not anticipate the scientific revolutions of the last century. Contrary to what Foucault maintained, his relentless struggle against the 'theological quibbles' of the commodity impelled him well beyond the epistemological horizon of his time.¹² Under the test of the great contemporary controversies, his thought appears as one of the least dated and least outmoded. His correspondence shows

the way to the unprecedented type of science to which he aspired: 'Economics as a science *in the German sense of the term* remains to be created.' He thus pursued the Hegelian idea of a philosophy of nature and a knowledge of life, opposed to the indifferent cohabitation of scholarly findings. Faced with the dismemberment of science into distinct disciplines, he did not renounce the movement of totalization on the pretext of elucidating the dispersed domains of knowledge one by one. For Hegel, the knowledge that the positive sciences boasted was defective, in terms of both the poverty of its goal and the defective character of its matter. Just as for Hegel, essence is the truth of being, so for Marx value is the truth of capital, its 'intemporal past' always present beyond its formal metamorphoses. And just as the Hegelian essence takes phenomenal form in existence, so value does in capital. This appearance is in no way a disguise or a costume, but the actual appearance of its being.

A 'science of the third type', in Spinoza's expression. 'Science of the contingent', for Leibniz. 'Speculative science' for Hegel. It is the quest for this other scientificity that Marx pursued by way of 'German science'. This dream of a philosophical science, which would not surrender in the face of the positive sciences, echoes the still inaudible thunder of Hegelian logic, prolonged by the rumbling of *Capital* that was just as inaudible to its contemporaries. How is it possible today to remain deaf to this 'other idea of knowledge' that 'revolutionizes and overflows its own idea'?

Maurice Blanchot understood this better than the majority of exegetists of Marx: neither science nor thought emerge from this work intact. The 'third word of Marx', his scientific word, is distinguished from his second word, his political word, without being separated from it, a political word that demands 'permanent revolution' as 'ever present necessity'.¹³

When strategic directions are confused or erased, it is necessary to return to the essential: what it is that makes the world as it is unacceptable and makes it impossible to resign oneself to the blind force of things. Its explosive mixture of partial rationalization and growing global irrationality. The disproportion and disarray of a deranged world. This is why the world still has to be changed, and still more profoundly and more urgently than we had imagined forty years ago. Any doubt bears on the possibility of succeeding, not on the necessity of trying.

Changing it? After having admitted this urgency, the illustrator Pierre Wiaz asked me if I still truly wanted 'it'. What 'it'? Certainly

not the best of worlds, nor a happy utopia designed to plan, like a housing-estate bungalow. No utopian models or palaces! We have at least learned to distrust the jokers who promise absolute abundance and transparency. For a long time to come, we shall have to live with thresholds and limits, and to do so with economy of resources and relative opacity of social relations. This is no reason to abandon the movement of the negative that undermines the foundations of a tyrannical (dis)order. Nor to renounce the right of future generations to invent their own future. Those who overthrow the old world and those who build the new one are after all never one and the same. It was not because his life was cut short that Moses never reached Canaan, but because this is how human life is.

Change the world? Many would like to convince themselves of this. But how? Placed under the double categorical imperative of resisting and continuing, the 1980s no longer had the means to pose this problem. The important thing was not to bend, not to give in, not to submit to the proclaimed fatality of the commodity order. This was the cry of the Zapatista revolt of 1 January 1994, echoing as an appeal to stand up and be counted, to form a front: '*Ya, basta!*' Enough!

Changing the world is more difficult, certainly, than Marx and our own earlier selves believed. But it is no less necessary than it ever was. From the international demonstrations of the World Social Forums, the impatient need for something new has once again begun to move. A shiver, still fragile and timid, like an uncertain convalescence, insufficient to reverse the regressive spiral of retreats and defeats. But just proclaiming that another world is needed already means shaking the yoke of the *fait accompli*. So that this other world becomes possible, another left is needed. Not a left in denial or shame, not a 'lite' or dehydrated left, but a left of struggle, up to the mark of the challenges of the age.

End and Continuation

To sense
That life is a breath
That twenty years is nothing.
— Carlos Gardel*

The 1980s were sordid. The 1990s began a renewal. As if, having touched bottom, there was no alternative but to rise to the surface. But one can never be sure to have left the worst behind. Pierre Frank said that in 1939 he had almost welcomed the War with relief: after the terrible 1930s, it seemed that things could get no worse! We know what followed.

On the threshold of the 90s, certain bold spirits thought they could proclaim the end of history, make liberal capitalism the unsurpassable horizon of all time, and celebrate the advent of commodified eternity.

History did not take long to rebuff them.

And the earth began once more to tremble. The Zapatista cry of 1 January 1994, the French strikes of winter 1995, the Seattle demonstrations of 1999, were indeed the sign of a shift, even if not yet a full turn. Like a convalescent taking their first hesitant steps, the air of the time was changing colour.

Eternity and infinity are reactionary concepts. Better to leave the first to God (if S/He exists), and the second to mathematics.

Nothing should be seen as immutable.¹

These years of renewal were for me years of 'the capital test of sickness', this 'first trial of death'.² In contrast to Péguy, touched by divine grace during a bad attack of flu, I did not seek comfort in any

* *Sentir/Que es un soplo la vida/Que veinte años es nada.*

transcendence. I followed the social struggles of winter 1995 mainly on radio and television, shivering in bed with cold fever, listing over and over to the concertos of Francesco Geminiani, and re-reading the Stoics. I dragged myself to a few demonstrations on wobbly pins. The following year, I came face to face with death.

For the twentieth anniversary of *Rouge quotidien*, Denis Pingaud and Bertrand Audusse had the idea of bringing together in late June 1996, in our old café on the impasse Guéménée, the people – journalists, machinists, keyboard operators, block-makers – who had been part of this adventure.* Baptised ‘Rouges Baisers’, its success couldn’t be taken for granted. In twenty years, a lot of water had flowed under the bridge. The risk was an evening of nostalgia, eating and drinking lavishly mixed with recriminations and grimaces. But apart from some empty seats, it was a very pleasant occasion. Despite their divergent ideological and professional trajectories, the guests were happy to meet up again. That was the evening I touched bottom, exhausted, emaciated, haggard, like poor Heine ‘reduced to a spiritualist skeleton struggling against absolute deliquescence’.³ Instead of meeting up with old friends, I had the impression of attending a farewell ceremony, or the last ball of the Guermantes, as an already absent spectator.

The next day, Sophie and I left for Uzès, where Denis Pingaud had invited us. Dipping into the Euro football cup on TV, and thanks to the miracles of medicine, I put on a few grams and gained a little strength. In September, after a stay at the Clos de la Reine Claude, Lucienne’s high-calorie cooking based on goose fat had restored me enough to visit my gravely ill mother, without causing her despair in her last moments by too terrifying an image.

Knowing oneself to be mortal – we all do, more or less – is one thing. Something else to experience this and really believe it. It modifies proportions and timeframes. Speculations on the distant future become futile. The present, on the other hand, takes a sharper relief, reaching a kind of plenitude. You seek to live in the moment, with infinity and eternity as neighbours.

Illness had familiarised me with spectres and revenants, and this test led me towards their side. Unable to act and travel freely, writing

* Denis Pingaud, until the late 1970s a member of the LCR and journalist for the daily *Rouge* (pseudonym: Séraphin). Subsequently in Laurent Fabius’s Socialist cabinet and then an adviser to alterglobalisation activist and farmer José Bové, whose biography he published in 2001. Also wrote *La gauche de la gauche* (2000) and *L’Effet Besancenot* (2008).

became the privileged expression of this spectral condition. I withdrew from the everyday political responsibilities, both national and international, that I had held since 1966. I reserved my energy for particular campaigns: for the ‘*non de gauche*’ to Maastricht in 1992 (alongside Max Gallo, not yet touched by grace);* the legislative elections of 1993; the petitions in solidarity with the social movement of 1995; the mobilisation against the *loi Debré* and in support of the *sans-papiers* in February 1997 (together with Léon Schwartzberg, with whom we had launched an appeal of ‘unpronounceable names’);† the sesquicentenary of the *Communist Manifesto* in 1998; the appeal ‘from Jews’ (launched with Marcel-Francis Kahn, Rony Brauman, Stanislas Tomkiewicz)‡ at the start of the second Intifada.⁴

In 1992, at the absolute ebb of the wave, we had formed a ‘discreet society’, the Société pour la résistance à l’air du temps (Sprat).⁵ Its very modest aim was to discuss topical questions without concern for visibility or publication: the European project, the resurgence of religion and the question of secularism, notions of citizenship, the wars in the Gulf and the Balkans, the situation in the Middle East, the housing question, etc. The monthly meetings, attracting around fifty regulars, were held for the best part of a decade. They stopped when the social function of the society seemed to have run its course. Other sites of meeting and debate had arisen in the meantime, more directly engaged in political activity, such as the Copernic foundation and the scientific council of ATTAC. You have to know how to end a conspiracy of friends.

Illness frees one from everyday vanities, derisory concerns and calculations of self-interest. On the other hand, it makes one more

* Max Gallo, born 1932, academic, novelist and historian, publishing best-selling books. A member of the PCF until 1956, and then a Socialist MP from 1981. A spokesperson for the Mauroy government, he then joined Jean-Pierre Chevènement’s split from the Socialists, the Mouvement de Citoyens. An opponent of the European Constitution. Publicly backed Sarkozy’s 2007 presidential campaign. A member of the Académie française.

† Léon Schwartzberg, 1923–2003, a doctor, active in the Resistance. In 1988, he was minister of health for just nine days in the Michel Rocard (Socialist) government, having spoken in favour of euthanasia, drug legalisation and systematic HIV screening of pregnant women. A member of the European Parliament and founder of Droits Devant! (‘Rights First!’). A supporter of undocumented migrants and the homeless and poorly-housed, an opponent of GM food.

‡ Rony Brauman, born 1950 in Jerusalem, president of Médecins sans frontières France (1982–94). Associate professor at the Paris Institut d’Études Politiques Paris (1994–97). Essayist for the magazine *Alternatives Internationales*. Opposed to Western military intervention in Libya in 2011.

sensitive to ephemeral pleasures and attentive to new encounters and friendships that come and go. If politics no longer gripped me as it had done, it still did not leave me. After Swann's possessive passion for Odette de Cr  cy had cooled, he noted with a disabused astonishment: 'To say that I have wasted years of my life, I have wanted to die, I have had my greatest love, for a woman whom I didn't like, who was not my type.' I did not have the feeling of having wasted years of my life. I did not want to die to politics. As for my 'greatest love', I love her as in the first days. Whereas I wonder sometimes if politics was really me, and if I didn't have some other vocation.

I have the passion for action and social questions, a taste for controversy and discussing ideas. In contrast to Alain Krivine or Fran  ois Sabado, I have little talent for calculating the balance of forces, for patient negotiations and the necessary work of alliances. Above all, I do not have the least appetite for power. The task of leadership inspires in me a holy repulsion: I prefer to do things myself rather than tell others what to do. That could be seen as an egalitarian virtue. But it can also be the sign of a disorganising inability to delegate and trust others. It was in any case for a long time the most common defect among the leaders of the Ligue. Brought up to combat Stalinism and bureaucracy, we acquired an egalitarian culture and a stubborn distrust of the effects of hierarchy and command.

This oddly libertarian Leninism⁶ is not unrelated to a lack of proselyte zeal, humorously stressed by Andr   Fichaut in his memoirs. It may be the consequence of too long a minoritarian political existence, impelling one to suggest, inspire, act by substitute, by whispering in the ear of the powerful and playing adviser to the prince. We have indeed been an 'absolute minority' more often than a relative majority. You acquire the taste for this, to the point of making a virtue out of necessity:

By instinct I will contradict a *unanimous* vote by any assembly that will not take it upon itself to contradict the vote of a larger assembly, but by the same instinct I will give my vote to those who are *climbing higher*, what with every new program tending to the greater emancipation of man and not yet having been tested by the facts. Considering the historical process, where it is fully understood that truth shows itself only so as to laugh up its sleeve and never be grasped, I am on the side of this minority that is endlessly renewable.⁷

This challenge has its share of nobility. Like all nobility, it runs the risk of collapsing into elitism, giving way to an aristocratic aesthetics of dissidence and defeat. It also risks developing minoritarian pathologies, the most widespread of which is sectarianism. Some people have seen the stubborn absence of prosyletism that distinguished us from most organisations of the radical left as a deferred perverse effect of the myth of a chosen people: either you are chosen or you aren't. More seriously, it can be interpreted as a form of modesty and respect towards the free choice of others, each person being grown-up enough to decide what they will do without being led by the hand. But this ambiguous tact can well turn into condescension, letting other people believe that you have no need for them. Persuasion is also a form of respect. To assume that your interlocutor is capable of understanding what you believe you have understood yourself implies a relationship of reciprocity: seeking to convince means accepting the risk of being convinced in return.

Suspicion of any logic of power is undoubtedly salutary. But is it possible to imagine, until the advent of a new order, a politics without authority, without powers, organisations, parties? That would be a kind of politics without politics. Today's fashionable discourse on the crisis of the 'party form' is above all a way of avoiding the question of contents and projects. Perhaps the construction of a revolutionary organisation is both necessary and impossible, like absolute love in the writings of Marguerite Duras.

But that never stopped anyone falling in love.

Politics is an art of decision, and implies constructing a power. By establishing the exception as norm, it resolves a critical situation. For a new right is never deducible by genealogy from an old right, without rupture or discontinuity. It comes about by the mediation of force.⁸

How to act in such a way that this force is not reduced to arbitrary brutality? Between two opposing rights, a decision has to be made. 'Choosing your camp' means deciding. And deciding means a certain sacrifice of complexity, of a good number of possibilities, rather like amputating a virtual part of oneself. The real, after all, what is called 'actually existing', is a great cemetery of possibilities.

Melancholy politics, the melancholy of politics: in the absence of any divine command or last judgement, faced with the uncertainty of one's own result, decision inevitably assumes the form of a wager. It becomes melancholy when the necessary and the possible diverge.

But this does not make decision simply arbitrary. The strategic calculation of probabilities makes the difference between legitimate will and arbitrary voluntarism, between a reasoned wager, which is the political condition of man without God, and an act of faith.⁹

There is no ultimate certainty on which to base judgement. We are embarked, as the subtle Pascal put it. It is impossible to escape the tough duty of deciding.

So we have to wager.

Max Weber defined politics as the vocation of the man who, when the world seems too stupid or too petty to hope to change it, does not collapse and remains able to say 'however' and 'despite everything'.

What exactly is the politics on which we embarked forty years ago? Contemptuously defying the orthodox tradition, we happily proclaimed that 'everything is political'. Everything is quite a lot, indeed too much. Everything? To a certain extent, and up to a certain point. If we want to avoid politics becoming despotic and totalitarian by devouring everything else, then that exact extent and precise point are decisive. Another register, another temporal regime: you cannot legislate on the Oedipus complex or on sexual orientation as you can on the civil service or social security.

Politics is said to be in crisis, struck by impotence and threatened with disappearing. Hannah Arendt was already worried that it would disappear completely from the world. The statisation of the social, the confusion between right and might, is one form of this menace. Another form is the crushing of the public space between the wheels of economic constraint and those of a culpabilising moralism: this is the danger of a 'soft', market totalitarianism. The crisis of politics then appears as a crisis of diversity without difference, and a crisis of the legitimacy of a system unable to combine hegemony and coercion.

To rescue politics from these threats of disappearance, it has to be conceived anew, as the site of deliberation and decision where different spaces and rhythms combine. Those of the economy, of information, of ecology and of law are no longer in tune with one another. We have therefore to abandon the mirage of a politically homogeneous space and time, and learn to conceive the sites and moments of a future politics. Their articulation will determine the ability to open perspectives both spatial (territorial and local) and temporal (of memory and expectation), without which depoliticised politics degenerates into the management of a shrunken present, without either past or future.

Its anaemia is manifested by the denigration of the project. On the pretext that programmes imposed from above have mutilated the real and disfigured history, a well-behaved caution recommends standing aloof from the prosaic administration of the immediate moment, and leaving the future untilld.

Primordially, crisis is both uncertain struggle and decisive judgement. A terrifying duty, which the terrible faculty of judgement imposes. How to judge without doubting one's own judgement. Péguy said he was so horrified of judgement that he preferred to condemn rather than to judge. Condemnation without judgement? To invoke the big capitalised words of History or Humanity means continuing to bow the knee to modern fetishes. The minuscule history that is made every day, in the contingency of struggle, is not ventriloquous History, and the minuscule humanity that shapes itself in the tumult of conflict is not majestic and sovereign Humanity.

Profane politics works for an uncertain goal. It opposes the work to be accomplished to the fatality of the accomplished fact. It sticks to the uncertainty of action invented without the assurance of an origin or an end. It does not flinch from the fragility of a judgement always condemned to produce its own criteria.

If everything is generated by necessity and struggle, the outcome of battles, said Kant, 'is habitually mixed with our appreciation of the foundations of right'. We have to live with this finality without end and this legality without law, with the failings and injustice of the human faculty of judgement. Historical knowledge – alas, or happily – is never categorical.

This is indeed why, whatever the rituals by which we wager, the great trials for heresy, theological or historical, remain 'political acts'. Their lesson has no more end than does history itself. The case is never closed. Appeal remains always open, said Blanqui, facing the vertigo of an eternal recommencement of defeats.

If the division between the true and the false, the good and the bad, the just and the unjust, is for most of the time imprecise and poorly assured, it is on the other hand never non-existent. Sometimes reduced to almost nothing, that almost is not nothing. It marks the difference making it possible to rise above that modern cynicism for which all things are equivalent. However tenuous and fluctuating it may be, this parting of the waters is sufficient to ensure that, if there is not an absolute justice, there are at least moments and acts of justice, so that a 'fairly precise and indelible demarcation' can be

established against both sceptical indifference and dogmatic certainty.

There have always been the Just, who did not claim to act either as gods or as judges, to point out the way and recall us, not to the order of a tyrannical truth, but rather to one of correctness, which is an adjusted justice. In politics as in history, it is not easy to follow this narrow line along the ridge. It is even so difficult that no single form of judgement can ever suffice: neither the judicial, which is the clearest but also the most impoverished; nor the historical, which is the richest but the most doubtful; nor the political, which may be the most honest, but is also the most disturbing. For whoever judges in politics cannot ignore the reciprocity of judgement. He will be judged in his turn. What is needed, then, is the different modes of judgement in combination, at the risk of mutual contradiction. Controversies between the juridical, the historical and the political are even the only conceivable safeguard against their respective errors.

The faculty of judging is thus neither coldly judicial, nor proudly historical, nor passionately political. It operates in the intervals and interstices, in the whirlpool movement of what used to be called customs. Judgement then loses its sacred aureole. It becomes a profane art, 'a process without subject or end', with neither a higher court nor a Last Judgement.

Who is the judge?

Who is guilty?

And above all, who is innocent?

Answering these questions is a heavy burden. Neither the prosecutor, nor the historian, nor the citizen, can bear it alone.

And Yet . . .

In a short while acrobats are going to come, in tights spangled with an unknown colour, the only colour to date which absorbs both sunlight and moonlight at the same time. This colour will be called freedom and the sky will break out all its blue and black oriflammes, for a completely favourable wind will have arisen for the first time and those who are there will realize that they have just set sail and that all preceding so-called voyages were only a trap.

— André Breton

We have seen without regret the end of the century of extremes, with its train of disasters and catastrophes. Margarethe von Trotta's film on Rosa Luxemburg showed the bearded patriarchs of social democracy, on 1 January 1900, celebrating the new century with an unshakeable faith in the direction of the progress this century would see in an end to wars and exploitation, a great universal fraternisation. We know what happened. And so we did not have the heart to celebrate the new millennium with the same confidence. Wars and crusades without limit, abyssal inequalities, the unleashing of religious and national fanaticisms: the horizon is heavily clouded.

Once again, lugubrious voices are heard (sometimes the same as those that recently hymned the blessings of progress), proclaiming the end of time and punishment for our sins. This is still the same one-way thinking, refractory to contradiction, simply with the direction reversed. And yet it is hazardous indeed to establish between the centuries a hit parade of barbarisms. More problematic still to know whether, on the scale of history, Cerdan will loom larger than Carlos Monzon or Sugar Ray Leonard, Joe Louis over Jack Dempsey or Cassius Clay. The old days were not so merciful, after all, the days of the slaves who built the pyramids, those of the great famines and great plagues, of the Inquisition and the slave trade, of colonial

massacres and burning at the stake, of the religious wars of Thirty or a Hundred years!

Things can be viewed differently. The terrible century of extremes was also a century of contrasts. It saw the end of several colonial and continental empires (the tsarist, the Ottoman, the British, the French, the Belgian, the Dutch, the Japanese). It proclaimed universal human rights, recognised in principle equality between races and sexes, condemned crimes against humanity. There is still a long way from principles to reality, but only a rare few now dare to openly reject them, so that they form a point of support against the actual state of things.

A more balanced vision of the past, however, does not authorise us to let ourselves be lulled to sleep by lullabies of progress, as if, like in the operettas of the Belle Époque, everything would be sorted out in a final apotheosis of spangles and songs.

The claim is often made that you have to live with your time. The present time is dying. Should we therefore perish and disappear with it? That would be in the order of things. Or rather make a new beginning, like the handful of those rejecting the *union sacrée* who met at Zimmerwald, like Victor Serge refusing to accept the reason of the winners when it struck midnight in the century, like the faceless Zapatistas who defied commodity fatalism?

The start of the 1990s was certainly a dim light. But the signs of renewal appeared more quickly than one might have imagined, gradually sketching the floating form of a movement to come, which did not yet have a name. The threads of this tapestry crossed and knotted along the way. On 1 January 1994 the Zapatistas launched their 'intergalactic appeal' from the Chiapas mountains, shaking the yoke of fatalities and resignations. The following year, in the wake of strikes in defence of public service, the '*sans*' of all sorts (*sans-logis*, *sans-papiers*, *sans-emploi*, *sans-terre*) in France demanded their right to politics. In 1998, the failure of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment showed the possibility not only of struggling but also of winning. In 1999, a motley coalition placed Seattle in a state of siege and capsized the summit of the World Trade Organization. Finally, in 2001, the first World Social Forum was held in Porto Alegre.

That was a long path already trodden in less than eight years. Man is indeed a 'slow creature, possible only thanks to imaginary gears'!¹ From one year to the next, the movement expanded and politicised. Porto Alegre 2001: a gathering against the excesses of liberal

deregulation, for a tax on capital, for the abolition of Third World debt and the struggle against tax havens. Porto Alegre 2002: the globalisation of resistance, on the themes 'the world is not for sale' and 'another world is possible'. Porto Alegre 2003: the launch of a campaign against imperialist war and the new militarism, in preparation for the unprecedented global day of anti-war demonstrations of 15 February. In less than four years, Porto Alegre had eclipsed Davos. While the internationalist forums of the multitudes are held in public and in the street, the summits of the masters of the world take place behind closed doors, on invitation, and in a state of siege: cries and whispers!

Yet one should not fall into illusions about the direction of history, and believe that the globalisation of capital will automatically and definitively bring about a globalisation of solidarity. Those who gamble unilaterally on such a virtuous circle will be disappointed. The movement is a double one. On the one side, commodified globalisation tends to unify resistances; on the other, it organises competition in the labour market, divides the oppressed and opposes them to one another, and generalises the competition of all against all.

Who will win? A question of politics.

Revolts against globalised injustice are multiplying. But the spiral of retreats and defeats has not been broken. Number and mass are not enough, without will and consciousness. The Argentinian people overthrew three governments in a few months, but the country is still under the thumb of the IMF. The Workers' Party won the Brazilian election, but the new government immediately submitted to the constraints of the markets. Millions of people demonstrated in the streets of Rome and Paris, against privatisations and in defence of pensions, but privatisations and the dismantling of the welfare state are continuing. Tens of millions demonstrated against the invasion and occupation of Iraq, but the war took place, Iraq was occupied, and military budgets escalated.

A resistance without victories and perspectives of counter-attack ends up being worn out. There is no victory without strategy, and no strategy without a balance of forces. But the landscape of what was formerly the left has been devastated to the point that the opposition between 'centre-right' and 'centre-left' has become invisible. The twentieth century began with three great revolutions: the Russian, the Chinese and the Mexican. It ended in the ruins of the Twin Towers, the debris of Baghdad, the destruction of Nablus and Jenin.

Strategy degree zero?

Or undoing of the strategies of yesterday?

And yet history is moving for all that. The logic of a system governed by private interest and egoistic calculation is incompatible with the proclaimed universality of human rights or the recognition of a substantive equality.² Each unresolved contradiction only aggravates the following crisis and increases the dangers.

Capital has survived the twentieth century, but at what price? Two world wars, genocides, ecocides . . . and after? Today it flees before its own shadow, in an escalation of violence. Through the voice of George W. Bush, declaring the whole world in a permanent and unlimited preventive war, the state of exception has effectively become the rule. International law has been suspended. The institutions of 'global governance', from the UN to the World Trade Organization, including the Earth summits, are powerless or paralysed.

This crisis, dragging on indefinitely, is not an ordinary stop-go crisis, with its ups and downs, and the consolation of telling oneself that things will necessarily get better tomorrow. For the first time in more than a century, the citizens of this world are no longer convinced that their children will live better than they have. It is a crisis of civilization. A generalized breakdown of measures and relations, of which the social crisis and the ecological crisis are the two most flagrant manifestations. It is a short step from this to privatizing the sun and patenting the alphabet and mathematics.

The crisis of politics is part of this great crisis. At a time of capitalist expansion and struggles for a less unjust division of wealth, when economists spoke of unemployment as if this was a matter of 'residual pockets', while predicting the escape of poor countries from dependence and under-development, citizen participation seemed to be expanding. Universal suffrage tended to become the norm. It is now on the retreat. Exclusion and abstention are tending to re-establish a restricted suffrage in fact, if not in law. Freed from state and legal constraints, despite lyrical odes to democracy, capital acts as the prime extra-parliamentary force.

On the pretext of a generalised extension of human rights, the servile minds of Davos and the merchants of media illusion could claim only yesterday that imperial domination was being dissolved in market homogeneity. But the same development always continues, always as unequal, always as badly combined, the same hierarchical

system of force and command needed to discipline the chaotic behaviour of the markets.

The neoliberal counter-reform is methodically undermining the social pacts and compromises of the postwar era. By the same token, it destroys social movements and delegitimises the virtual interlocutors of the social dialogue that it claims to establish.

In the last twenty years, social democracy has collaborated in this demolition, when it has not initiated it. In this way it has cut the very branch on which it rests. Champion of a reformism without reforms, it has abandoned the flag of reform to the conservative right, allowing this to present itself as the party of movement as against the immobilism of corporatisms and conservatism.

The debacle of 21 April 2002 was the consequence of this abandonment. On the night of their electoral victory on 1 June 1997, the representatives of the new majority appeared on the television screen as kids with contrite expressions who had just been pardoned for a serious offence, and who promised, hand on their hearts, not to do it again: 'We don't have the right to disappoint, we no longer have the right to make mistakes.' And yet! Three years before, Lionel Jospin in person had warned: 'Reform has defeated revolution, but the reformists give the impression of no longer believing in reforms'.³

Lost in the dead centre, fallen into alternation in government without alternative, the governing left no longer knows what it is or where it should go. In 1990, Laurent Fabius already asked: 'If it is certainly democratic, in what way is modern socialism socialist?'⁴ A good question, and thanks again for raising it. It calls for a second question: is it still possible to be truly democratic without being truly socialist?

In opposition, the social-liberal left invokes the myth of a new social compromise in order to conceal its lack of a project. The Keynesian episode now appears as an exception in the history of capitalism, and not the rule. The great fear of the ruling classes and the growth of the three postwar decades, itself underpinned by postwar reconstruction and the establishment of a global hegemonic order, is

* In June 1997, a governmental alliance of the Socialist Party, Greens, Communists and other left formations came to power with Lionel Jospin as prime minister, 'cohabiting' with Jacques Chirac as President of the Republic. In the first round of the presidential elections of 2002, the Socialist candidate won a lower score than the Front National's candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen. There was subsequently a run-off between Chirac and Le Pen, won by a massive majority by the former.

what made it possible. But the sequence of stagnation and recession, begun already in the 1970s, has now lasted longer than the growth of the postwar golden age.

The signs of exhaustion proliferated already in the 1970s: the fall of the dictatorships in Western Europe, the independence of the Portuguese colonies, the failure of the American intervention in Indochina, the bankruptcy of developmental strategies in Latin America, revolutionary crises in Central America, the disintegration of the shah's regime in Iran, the exhaustion of bureaucratic expansion in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Since then, a redistribution of the cards and a new situation were on the order of the day. The counter-offensive of capital began. Chronicle of a war announced (both imperial and social).

A new period of expansion can certainly not be ruled out, true as it is that there is never a situation with no escape, and history is not written in advance. But on whose back, and at what price? Previous escapes from crisis lead us to fear that this price will be such as to compromise the very future of our species.

As a child, I was a passionate reader of *The Quest for Fire*.^{*} I followed with a beating heart the efforts of Naoh and his frail companions to protect the spark and keep the flame alive. To save what can still be saved, to fail but pass the torch down to the next generation, is something like our own 'quest for fire'.⁵ There have been the most glorious struggles and the most resounding victories. But no matter how fragile and obscure, they are still worth something.

Today's political landscape is devastated by battles lost without even having been fought. The forces needed for reconstruction exist, and the relationship between capital and labour remains as asymmetrical as ever: the former cannot dispense with the latter, while the same is in no way true the other way round. In these last ten years, there has still not been the political left that is needed for us to stand upright.

In order for the other world that is necessary to become possible, another left is equally necessary. Not a left 'lite', like fat-free butter, alcohol-free wine or decaffeinated coffee, but a left of struggle, to match the right of struggle. We can no longer be satisfied with a left resigned to the subaltern role of opposition to the republican or liberal

* *La Guerre du feu*, very popular novel set in the prehistoric period by J.-H. Rosny aîné and published for the first time in France in 1911.

bourgeoisie. It is high time to break this vicious circle of subordination.

This will be the task of new figures who are starting to rise. Sometimes the eye of poetry sees much farther than that of politics. Half a century ago, André Breton already espied their appearance somewhere in the world. No one at that time could say with certainty what they would invent. But they inevitably would arise:

[I]n the present turmoil, in the face of the unprecedented seriousness of this crisis that is social as well as religious and economic, it would be a mistake to conceive of them as products of a system that we are thoroughly acquainted with. There is no doubt that they are coming from some horizon that is a matter of conjecture: still they will have had to *make their own* several closely related programmes for making demands, programmes which parties up to now have wanted to have nothing to do with – or we will soon fall back into barbarism. Not only must the exploitation of man by man cease, but also the exploitation of man by the so-called ‘God’ of absurd and exasperating memory. The problem of the relations between men and women must be re-examined from top to bottom, with no trace of hypocrisy and in such a manner as to brook no delay . . . No more weaknesses, no more childish behaviour, no more ideas of indignity, no more torpor, no more lounging about, no more putting flowers on tombs, no more civics lessons between two gym classes, no more tolerance, no more diversions.⁶

Notes

1. Fourth Person Singular

- 1 The prohibition of image and representation.
- 2 The jury was chaired by Georges Labica, and included Jacques Derrida, Michael Löwy, René Schérer and André Tosel.
- 3 See Gilles Perrault, *Go!* (Paris: Fayard, 2002).
- 4 Ernesto Guevara, letter to his parents, January 1967.
- 5 Michel Foucault, 'Structuralism and Post-Structuralism', in M. Foucault, *Power* (Penguin: London, 2002), p. 449.
- 6 Hervé Hamon and Patrick Rotman, *Génération* (Paris: Seuil, 1988).
- 7 Cited by Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).
- 8 See René Schérer, *Regards sur Deleuze* (Paris: Kimé, 1998).
- 9 André Suarès, *Valeurs et autres écrits* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2002), p. 337.
- 10 Heinrich Heine on Schelling, 'On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany', *Selected Prose* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993), p. 287.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 François Maspero, *L'Abeille et la Guêpe* (Paris: Seuil, 2002), p. 200. Maspero comments here on Cortázar's story.
- 13 Christophe Nick, Philippe Cohen and Emmanuel Lemieux. The first of these launched this movement in his book on the Trotskyists; the others followed in his footsteps. [Reference to three political journalists, the former the author of *Les Trotskyistes* (Paris: Fayard, 2002), the second an editor for *Marianne* magazine, and the third the author of *Pouvoir intellectuel. Les nouveaux réseaux*, (Paris: Éditions Denoël, 2003).]
- 14 André Suarès, *Idées et Visions* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2002), p. 158.
- 15 In Deng's more picturesque expression, 'Do not care if a cat is black or white, what matters is it catches mice.' For myself, I've kept the troublesome tendency to take the standpoint of the mouse – rarely taken into consideration here.
- 16 Jean-Christophe Bailly, *Le Paradis du sens* (Paris: Bourgois, 1967).
- 17 Paul Valéry, *Variétés II* (Paris: Folio, 1998), p. 336.
- 18 The 'hypomnemata' that fascinated Foucault could serve as a model. Before the formation of modern subjectivity, according to him, these involved material memory and raw material gathered preliminary to a finished writing. Memoranda to which things read or heard were consigned, along with actions and examples that one had witnessed, and fragments of books: 'the idea was to constitute oneself as subject by

the appropriation, unification and subjectification of a fragmentary already-said' (Michel Foucault, 'L'écriture de soi', in *Dits et Écrits* II (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), p. 1249). I regret here not having mastered the hypertext techniques that make it possible to open up spaces of digression, make comparisons, establish resonances and proceed to a montage in which the disorders of memory would disturb the dispositions of history.

2. The Party of Flowers and Nightingales

- 1 See Benjamin Fondane, *L'Écrivain devant la révolution* (Paris: Paris-Méditerranée, 1997 [1935]).
- 2 Maurice Blanchot, *Les Intellectuels en question* (Paris: Fourbis, 1996).
- 3 Jacques Derrida, in Jacques Derrida and Éliane Roudinesco, *For What Tomorrow* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004).
- 4 Maurice Blanchot, *Les Intellectuels en question*.
- 5 By Dick Howard, at a debate in Bordeaux at the invitation of *Le Passant Ordinaire*.
- 6 See Dionys Mascolo, *Le Communisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1953); and *À la recherche d'un communisme de pensée* (Paris: Fourbis, 1993).
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Alfred de Musset, *Confessions d'un enfant du siècle* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1993).
- 9 See Charles Plisnier's fine book *Faux passeports*, winner of the Prix Goncourt in 1938, and recently reissued by Actes Sud.
- 10 Dionys Mascolo, 'La part irréductible' (2 October 1958), in *À la recherche d'un communisme de pensée*.
- 11 Michel Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment?', in P. Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), p. 50.
- 12 George Steiner, *Proofs and Three Parables* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973).
- 13 Hannah Arendt, *The Jew as Pariah* (New York: Grove, 1973).

3. The Force of Habit

- 1 The 'francas' (*francs camarades* [free comrades]) was a secular youth organisation, always ready for a fight with the 'talas' (those who 'allaient à la messe' [went to mass]).
- 2 My passion for Joan of Arc never took me to Domrémy. But I followed the road of her battles: Orléans, Patay, Jargeau, La Charité-sur-Loire, and that of her suffering: Saint-Valéry-sur-Somme, Compiègne, Rouen.

4. Errant Paths

- 1 For a tender and humorous memoir of the families Tauber and Barsony, see Piotr Barsony, *Ça va s'arranger* (Paris: Seuil, 2003).
- 2 On Aragon, see the devastating testimony of André Thirion in *Révolutionnaires sans révolution* (Arles: Actes Sud, 1999), and the vitriolic pamphlet of Jean Malaquais, *Aragon ou l'intelligence servile* (republished Paris: Syllepse, 1999). This in no way detracts from the virtuosity of Aragon's writing, which sometimes, as in *La Semaine sainte*, has the breath of Chateaubriand or Tolstoy, just a little spoiled by an artificial lyricism that verges on grandiloquence.

- 3 A kind of student pre-salaried position, awarded in the competition in exchange for a ten-year contract with the state education system.
- 4 The ENSET, at Cachan in the Paris conurbation, was the École Normale Supérieure de l'Enseignement Technique. [The ENS Saint-Cloud being one of France's three Écoles Normales Supérieures.]

5. Hopes and Disappointments

- 1 Or later, in a different genre, François Bon, artisan of a poetic prose of weather, machines, matter and landscape.
- 2 Jean-Christophe Bailly was a militant in the Ligue Communiste at Nanterre after 1968. He claims to have left when nightmares about a possible unification with Lutte Ouvrière began to inhibit his poetic imagination. Serge Pey, who rejoined the Ligue after 1968, remains a friend of mine and an internationally recognized poet, of inexhaustible inventiveness.
- 3 Diop appeared in Jean-Luc Godard's *La Chinoise*. He was killed some years later in a Senegal prison. [Omar Blondin Diop, Senegalese Marxist-Leninist, a former student of Louis-le-Grand and the École Normale Supérieure. Participated in May 68 in Paris. Returning to Dakar, he was arrested following his political activity in opposition to the policies of President Senghor. Charged with terrorism and spying, he was found hanged in his prison cell on the Ile de Gorée.]
- 4 They included Jean-Luc Painaut, Michel Tourneux, Gilbert Vaudy (Jederman) (inoculated against the stupefying Maoist catechism by his surrealist culture and his passion for the poets of *Le Grand Jeu*), and Jean-François Petillot (who would become the translator of Stefan Zweig).

[Jean-Luc Painaut (wrote as Abrahamovici – see his *Cahier Rouge sur le centrisme*).

An LCR member and teacher, in the Le Mans section of École Emancipée.

Michel Tourneux, LCR member, École Emancipée member, teacher.

Gilbert Vaudy (Jederman), born 1945, JCR Member. Teacher, writer.

Jean-François Petillot, born 1946, JCR Member (Serge Niémetz). University lecturer and translator of Leon Feuchtwanger and Stefan Zweig.]

- 5 'Gédéons', meaning 'grandes dirigeants', a term invented by Gilles Châtelet for these 'great leaders', in *Vivre et penser comes des porcs* (Paris: Exils, 1998).
- 6 Besides David Rousset's son Pierre, the host on these occasions, our circle included among others Henri Weber, Pascale Werner, Dominique Mehl, Bertrand Mary, Bertrand Prouet, Josette and Jeanine Trat, Philippe Mussat and Jean-Michel Gerassi. Marc Sautet, the future guru of philosophical cafés, made a few appearances. Guy Hocquenghem, the only one in our group from the rue d'Ulm, turned up sporadically, with a grim smile but strangely beautiful. He came from a different world, where he was alone in embodying our dissidence within dissidence.

[Pascale Werner, partner of Henri Weber and one of the comrades in charge of the Secours Rouge.

Dominique Mehl, before 1968 secretary of the psycho-social circle of the Paris JCR, treasurer of Krivine's 1969 presidential campaign. LC candidate for Ivry at the 1973 parliamentary elections. Today a sociologist at the Centre d'étude des mouvements sociaux (CNRS-EHESS).

Bertrand Mary, born 1946, member of JCR (Cercle socio-Philo). Sociologist and author of works on mass imagery as well as TV scriptwriter.

Bertrand Prouet, member of LC's political bureau at the beginning of the 1970s.

Jeanine Trat (aka Claire Bataille), in the JCR even before 1968, later in the LCR and its women's commission. Professor of secondary education. Made numerous contributions to the *Cahiers du Féminisme*.

Josette Trat (aka Desbois), senior lecturer in sociology at the Université de Paris VIII. Joined the JCR before 1968. On the LCR central committee and its women's secretariat, she was the driving force behind the *Cahiers du féminisme* (1977–98), and served on the NPA's national commission on feminism. Militant in the Collectif National pour les Droits des Femmes. Retired. Now in the Gauche anticapitaliste.

Philippe Mussat, JCR member in the Cercle Socio-Philo. LCR member at Montbéliard as part of the turn to industry then in the Parisian suburbs. Still active in the NPA.

Jean-Michel Gerassi, JCR member (Cercle Socio-Philo). Was a member of the tendency that opposed the creation of the Ligue Communiste. Anthropologist.

Marc Sautet, 1947–1998, JCR member (Cercle Socio-Philo). Teacher and translator of Nietzsche. Creator of the 'Cafés-Philo'.]

7 OLAS was established in Havana in 1967 at Cuban initiative. François Maspero had just published its documents in a special issue of the journal *Partisans*.

8 Our group there particularly included Xavier Langlade, Bernard Conein, Jean-François Godchau, Nicole Lapierre, Scalabrino, Brossat, Denise Avenas, Martine and myself. During the year we were joined by John Barzman (son of an American script-writer, driven to France by McCarthyism), Pierrette Bourgoin (the colonel's daughter), Sophie Petersen (future adviser at the Élysée under Mitterrand), Raymond Piskor, Danièle Schulmann, Jacques Rzepski, Manuel Castells (Spanish refugee, militant in Action Communiste, then graduate teacher in sociology), Evelynne Haas (partner of Serge July, who co-authored the memorable *Vers la guerre civile* with Geismar) and myself. Brigitte Jacque and Pascal Bonitzer made fleeting appearances.

[Xavier Langlade, 1948–2007, JCR militant from its 1966 creation. A sociology student at Nanterre in 1968, his arrest during an action against an American Express agency in Paris was the prelude to the events of May 68.

Bernard Conein, JCR member (Cercle Nanterre). Was one of the two people who introduced Kuron and Modzelewski's *Open Letter* to France. Sociologist and university professor.

Jean-François Godchau (Dumas), 1942–2002, member of the UEC then the JCR and LC/LCR, a protagonist of May 68 in Nanterre. Later returned to the campus as a lecturer in the law faculty. Music being a great passion of his, he was an unwavering defender of classical music in *Rouge*. Joined the Parti Socialiste in the late 1970s.

Nicole Lapierre, born 1947, JCR member (Cercle Nanterre). Sociologist at CNRS. Edits a series of essays at Éditions Stock.

John Barzman, born 1947, an LC and LCR member who had come from the US Socialist Workers' Party, not sharing his original party's minority positions in the Fourth International. Now a history professor at Le Havre's University and Sciences-Po.

Sophie Bouchet-Petersen (Sarah), born 1949, in the JCR at Nanterre even before May 68. Remained in the LCR until 1978. A member of its Renault cell, a typist at *Rouge*, and member of the central committee. In the Parti Socialiste from 1993, she was a culture adviser to François Mitterrand and now a collaborator of Ségolène Royal.

Raymond Piskor, JCR member (Cercle Nanterre). Postdoctoral researcher at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (1969).

Danièle Schulmann, born 1947, member of JCR (Cercle Nanterre) then became a Maoist activist. Librarian.

Jacques Rzepski, member of Ligue's Paris leadership and of the leadership of the *service d'ordre* in the 1970s.

Manuel Castells, born 1942, sociologist of Spanish origin. From 1962 to 1968 and 1970 to 1979, he lived in France; since 1979 mainly in California. Initially influenced by Louis Althusser, he was important influence on Marxist urban sociology in the 1970s, and later associated with research on the information society, communication and globalisation.

Evelyne Haas, 1944–2012, JCR member (Cercle Nanterre), film producer and scriptwriter.

Serge July, born 1942, in the UEC from 1961, and from 1965 vice-president of UNEF. In 1968 participated in the 22 March Movement. Author, together with Geismar, of *Towards Civil War*. Co-founder of the Gauche Prolétarienne, then the newspaper *Libération* in 1972, succeeding Sartre as its director. Having carried out its 'liberal-libertarian' turn, he left in 2006. TV, radio and magazine columnist (*L'Express*, *Les Inrockuptibles*).

Alain Geismar, born 1939, mining engineer. Started with the PSU youth, then general secretary of the SNES (higher education union) in 1967. After May 68, led the Maoist Gauche Prolétarienne. Sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment for reconstituting a banned organisation. From 1986 in the Parti Socialiste, and in 1990 inspector-general of national education. Worked in several ministerial offices.

Pascal Bonitzer, born 1946, Nanterre philosophy student, later famous as a screen-writer, actor and film critic. From 1969 worked on the *Cahiers du cinéma*.

- 9 'We are a small, radical minority!' [an ironic *détournement* of the accusations thrown at the students by the right, especially the Springer press].
- 10 Michel Surya, *De la domination* (Tours: Farrago, 1999), p. 33.
- 11 See Daniel Bensaïd and Henri Weber, *Mai 68: une répétition générale* (Paris: Maspero, 1968); also Daniel Bensaïd and Alain Krivine, *Mai si!* (Paris: La Brèche, 1988).

6. *Mai, si!* (Unfinished Business)

- 1 For a critical reevaluation of May 68, see Daniel Bensaïd and Alain Krivine, *Mai si!* (Paris: La Brèche, 1988).
- 2 Kristin Ross, *May '68 and Its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).
- 3 Wolf Lepenies, replying to a lecture by Kristin Ross at the Princeton Institute of Advanced Study in 1999: 'But nothing happened in France in 68. Institutions didn't change, the university didn't change, conditions for workers didn't change . . . 68 was Prague, and Prague brought down the Berlin Wall.' (Cited by Kristin Ross, *May '68 and Its Afterlives*, p. 19.)
- 4 Gilles Deleuze, *Deux régimes de fous* (Paris: Minuit, 2003 [1977]), p. 131.
- 5 Kristin Ross, *May '68 and Its Afterlives*, p. 6.
- 6 'August Comte has not discovered anything at all. He has classified, named and pedantized. This so-called founder of positive science abruptly hurled himself into the extravagances of mysticism. This destructor of dogmas improvised a religion of humanity with rituals and priests. Why? The coup d'état terrified him. He saw it as the sudden and unexpected triumph of the past. To bend it and seduce it, he offered it an ultra-aristocratic religion, a system of castes, the enslavement of the masses, the

absolute domination of the rich, all the accumulated madnesses of Brahmanism and Christianity.' Auguste Blanqui, *Carnets*, 1 April 1869, in *Instructions pour une prise d'armes* (Paris: Éditions de la Tête de Genille, 1972). Ideology, too has its comedy of repetition.

- 7 Régis Debray, *Modeste contribution aux cérémonies officielles du dixième anniversaire* (Paris: Maspero, 1978).
- 8 See Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut, *La Pensée 68* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985).
- 9 The title of a book by Daniel Cohn-Bendit published in 1988 for the twentieth anniversary (Paris: Seuil, 1988).
- 10 An eloquent slogan of Crédit Agricole bank for an advertising campaign in the 1990s.
- 11 Gilles Deleuze, *Deux régimes de fous*, p. 131.
- 12 Henri Weber, *Que reste-t-il de Mai 68?* (Paris: Seuil, 1998).
- 13 Inspired by Karl Mannheim, Kristin Ross effectively dismantles the function of the concept of generation that establishes a fictitious solidarity among an age class. In his *Lettre ouverte à ceux qui sont passés du col Mao au Rotary* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1986), Guy Hocquenghem railed against the supposed complicity of this club of ex's.
- 14 In his *Reply to John Lewis*, Althusser also maintains the thesis of 'Stalinian deviation', with its ballast of normative presuppositions.
- 15 'The fait accompli is an irresistible power. It is destiny itself. The spirit is burdened with it and dare not revolt. A terrible power for the fatalists of history, the worshippers of the fait accompli! All the atrocities of the victor are coldly transformed into inevitable regular evolution.' (Auguste Blanqui, *Instructions pour une prise d'armes*.)
- 16 The distinction between 'artistic critique' (bearing chiefly on alienation) and 'social critique' (bearing on social injustice) is developed by Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello in *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2006).
- 17 See Adolfo Gilly, *El Siglo del Relampago. Siete ensayos sobre el siglo XX* (Mexico City: Ediciones La Jornada, 2002).
- 18 Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives*, pp. 73–5. This approach to the question of power is in the same vein as those of Toni Negri in *Empire* and John Holloway in *Changing the World Without Taking Power*.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 26.
- 20 *Le Monde*, 20 May 1998.
- 21 Henri Weber, *Que reste-t-il de Mai 68?*

7. Thinking the Crisis

- 1 Étienne Balibar's contribution to *Reading Capital* would relieve this uncertainty: 'The "transition" from one mode of production to another can therefore never appear in our understanding as an irrational hiatus between two "periods" which are subject to the functioning of a structure, i.e. which have their specific concept. The transition cannot be a moment of destructuration, however brief. It is itself a movement subject to a structure which has to be discovered' (Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital* (London: Verso, 1970), p. 273).
- 2 Louis Althusser, 'Problèmes étudiants', in *La Nouvelle Critique*, January 1964. Althusser never authorised the republication of this article. See Daniel Bensaid, *Résistances* (Paris: Favard, 2001), p. 104. Also the collective volume *Contre Althusser pour Marx* (Paris: Éditions de la Passion, 2000).

- 3 The French edition of *The Function of the Orgasm* was translated and distributed under the counter by Boris Fraenkel and Jean-Marie Brohm.
- 4 Henri Lefebvre, *L'Idéologie structuraliste* (Paris: Anthropos, 1971). Instead of talking about something, structuralism as an ideology struck him as being satisfied with 'discoursing on discourse', each language demanding its metalanguage.
- 5 On Lacan's interpretation of the Freudian 'where Id was, there shall Ego be', see *Écrits* I (Paris: Seuil, 1967), pp. 416–17.
- 6 I thus borrowed from Sartre's critique of dialectical reason the definition of the project, stretched between its necessary conditions and the open horizon of possibles, as 'the moving unity of objectivity and subjectivity'.
- 7 See Gustave Guillaume, *Langage et Science de langage* (Laval: Presses de l'université de Laval, 1964).
- 8 'The more the proletariat acts resolutely and with assurance, and the more it is possible for it to lead the intermediate strata, the more the ruling stratum is isolated, the more its demoralization is increased; and on the other hand, the conflicts within the ruling strata bring grist to the mill for the revolutionary class.'
- 9 In *Political Power and Social Classes*, first published in 1968, Nicolas Poulantzas combines the theoretical abstraction of 'modes of production' with the empirical reality of 'social formations', within which they coexist and are articulated. Their point of articulation is the very place at which crisis arises in a determinate conjuncture. It becomes thus a specific political category. The point then is no longer to contemplate the mechanical succession of modes of production, but to conceive the revolutionary crisis of a concrete social formation, whose contradictions are actualised in class struggle.
- 10 This onesided reading of the Lukács of *History and Class Consciousness* would need correction today in the light of *A Defence of 'History and Class Consciousness'*, which Lukács published in 1926 (London: Verso, 2000).
- 11 Michel Foucault, *Dits et Écrits* II, p. 606. See in my *Marx for Our Times*, the second section on Marx as a critic of sociological reason.
- 12 If strategy makes it possible for the bourgeoisie to exert its domination, this does not actually mean that it acts as the sovereign subject of its own history, since 'bourgeois power has been able to develop grand strategies without the need to presuppose any subject for these' (*ibid.*, p. 310).
- 13 Hence the name 'Lotta Continua' chosen by one of the main revolutionary organisations in Italy.
- 14 Arthur Rosenberg, *History of Bolshevism: From Marx to the First Five Years' Plan* (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1967 [1939]).
- 15 'Organizational Questions of Russian Social Democracy', in P. Hudis and K.B. Anderson (eds.), *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004), p. 265.
- 16 A question on which Freud himself stumbled, as witness his 'topological' refashionings from the *Introduction to Psychoanalysis* to the *Metapsychology* and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.
- 17 George Lukács, *Lenin: A Study in the Unity of His Thought* (London: NLB, 1970), p. 24.
- 18 As a thinker of the event, Lukács also legitimated in this way the leftism illustrated by the disastrous insurrection of March 1921 in Germany. In the context of post-May 68, this theoretical leftism, haunted by the effect of example (illustrated in

particular by Che Guevara's tragic epic) or the spark able to light a prairie fire, had its attractions for us.

19 Lenin, *Left-Wing Communism*.

20 Lenin, *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*.

21 'History as a whole, and the history of revolutions in particular, is always richer in content, more varied, more multiform, more lively and more ingenious than is imagined by even the best parties, the most class-conscious vanguards of the most advanced class. This can readily be understood, because even the finest of vanguards express the class-consciousness, will, passion and imagination of tens of thousands, whereas at moments of great upsurge and the exertion of all human capacities, revolutions are made by the class-consciousness, will, passion and imagination of tens of millions, spurred on by a most acute struggle of classes.' Lenin, *Left-Wing Communism*, 'Several Conclusions'.

22 Ibid.

8. When History Breathed Down Our Necks

1 André Glucksmann, already hostile before 1968 to a 'ventriloquous structuralism', then echoed this subjectivist turn: in a short-lived magazine *Vent d'Est*, which never got beyond its first issue in 1969, he claimed that it was enough to 'expel the cop from our heads' for the walls of the capitalist Jericho to collapse.

2 I discovered when I landed at Porto Alegre in 1980 that it had become a classic, in a mimeographed translation, for the training of our comrades working underground in Brazil.

3 The radical student movement in Japan in the 1960s.

4 This spirited debate was published in 1969 in the form of three bulky pamphlets in the collection *Cahiers rouges* (Éditions Maspero), under the general title *Construire le parti, construire l'Internationale*.

5 Alain Krivine, Henri Weber, Charles Michaloux, Gérard Verbizier, Jean Labib, Jean-Marc Rosenfeld, Catherine Samary. [Jean-Marc Rosenfeld, born 1941, in the JCR and Parti Communiste Internationaliste as a Nanterre student. Then in the Ligue Communiste and LCR, serving on its central committee. Jointly responsible for teachers' organising in the 1970s and 80s. An École Emancipée representative for the SNES (Syndicat National de l'Enseignement secondaire) and FEN (Fédération de l'Education Nationale) teaching unions. More recently, in the NPA and Gauche Anticapitaliste.]

6 Isaac Johsua and Henri Maler, on the one hand, and on the other, Guy Hocquenghem, with the backing of André Glucksmann who, without being a member of the organisation, contributed to the minority documents. Bernard Guetta was undecided and unable to take a position. [Bernard Guetta, born 1951, journalist. A *hypokhâgne* (intensive preparatory literature degree) student at the Lycée Henri IV in May 68. He was a member of the CAL, then of the LC upon its foundation, also being, for a time, a member of its central committee. Having joined the *Nouvel Observateur*, he abandoned political activism in 1970. He has since been a mainstream journalist, first at *Le Monde* and subsequently at *France-Inter*.]

7 Camille Scalabrino, Michel Recanati, Michel Rotman and myself. See the document 'Pourquoi nous avons adhéré', in *De l'internationalisme à l'Internationale*, *Cahiers rouges*, no. 8–9.

8 Jean-Pierre Beauvais, now the publisher of the weekly *Politis* magazine, already performed the same service for *Rouge*, among other things negotiating with our small printer on the rue du Faubourg-Montmartre, which otherwise specialised in the racing press.

[Jean-Pierre Beauvais, 1945–2009, member of LC and LCR. Member of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International. Founding member of ATTAC.]

- 9 The title of a timeless theoretical essay published by Alain Krivine (with the help of Jeff Pétillot, later translator of Stefan Zweig under the pseudonym of Claude Niemetz).
- 10 A group of sympathising actors soon took up the baton. They met in a room at the Le Tambour café, on the place de la Bastille, and included Philippe Caubère, then a young actor with the Théâtre du Soleil.
- 11 A sophisticated simulation based on an imaginary albuminaria complicated by an iodine allergy that prevented X-ray examination for fear of risking a Quinke oedema. The case was watertight.
- 12 Including her faithful friends Olivier Cogis and Odile Recklin, who had had the patience to sustain her erratic course for more than thirty years, as well as Jacques and Françoise Treiner and Edwy Plenel from Paris.
- 13 Jacques Giron, Gilles Marquet and Gilbert Dufour.
[Jacques Giron, LC, LCR member. Hospital radiologist (Toulouse). Arrested in Spain in January 1972 for clandestine transport of illegal literature.
Gilles Marquet, LC member (Toulouse).
Gilbert Dufour, LC member (Toulouse).]
- 14 During these stays in Barcelona I was put up by a young couple of militants. The woman comrade was pregnant. When the baby was born, it was given as its official first name my own pseudonym of the time, Jébrac. That was a name I had inherited without choosing it, and it did not figure on any official document. A Catalan kid was thus lumbered with this exotic name with a vaguely Gascon sound. I never met this unknown godson. He died at the age of thirty in a motorbike accident.
- 15 These secret anti-Francoist effusions would have brought down the wrath of Jean-Marie Brohm, a fundamentalist critic of competitive sport. [Jean-Marie Brohm, professor of physical and sporting education then of sociology at the university of Montpellier. Director of the review *Quel Corps?*, he elaborated a critical theory of sport. Notably, he coordinated issue 43 of the journal *Partisans* on 'Sport, culture and repression' in 1968. A member of the OCI before 1968, he was subsequently briefly in the Ligue Communiste.]
- 16 Particularly under the charge of Jean-François Vilar, Alain Brossat, Bernard Cohen and Jean-Yves Potel, later also Jean-Louis Enet and Gilbert Paulat.

[Jean-François Vilar, born 1947, in the LC he was the national official responsible for the committees for the defence of conscripts. A full-time journalist for *Rouge*, from which he resigned in 1981. Devoted himself to writing crime novels with a social edge.

Bernard Cohen, LCR member, one of the leading figures in the anti-militarist campaigns. Journalist and translator.

Jean-Yves Potel (alias Touvais), born 1948, a writer and political scientist, specialist on central Europe. In 1968 he was a UNEF official in Nice, and was in the JCR, LC and LCR until 1979. Spent much time in Eastern Europe. From 1979 to 1985, editor of the journal *L'Alternative*, published by Maspero. Until 1998 worked for *Le Monde Diplomatique* and France-Culture.

Jean-Louis Enet (alias Boris or Jean-Louis Michel), born 1952, as a lycée student, close to the OCI. LCR full-timer, responsible for armed struggle work, director of *Rouge*, and member of its political bureau. Expelled, he established the Dijon-based group Solidarité 21. Recruited by Rebsamen, the Parti Socialiste mayor of Dijon, to be chief editor of the municipal newspaper. As of 2013, a member of the Front de Gauche.

Gilbert Paulat, LCR member, one of the key figures in the anti-militarist campaigns.]

- 17 See Sylvain Pattieu, *Les Camarades des frères* (Paris: Syllepse, 2002).
- 18 The parents of Paul Alliès, whose hospitality was unconditional and undaunting, did not suspect that their vineyards and the peaceful Clos de la Reine Claude sometimes hosted disturbing conspirators.
- 19 Régis Debray, *La Critique des armes*, vol. 1 (Paris: Seuil, 1974).

9. The Time of 'Hasty Leninism'

- 1 These included Gorriarán, the organiser a dozen or so years later of the spectacular assassination of the Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza in the streets of Asunción, where he had taken refuge after the Sandinista revolution.

[Enrique Haroldo Gorriarán Merlo, born on 18 October 1941 at San Nicolás de los Arroyos, Buenos Aires Province, Argentina. He was a loyalist of the Roberto Santucho-led Leninist Faction in the Argentinian Section of the reunified Fourth International, the PRT and when this organisation split from Nahuel Moreno's organisation, he was a founding member of the Santucho PRT's People's Revolutionary Army (Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo – ERP). He distinguished himself as a field commander of the ERP, leading its first offensive action, the attack on Police Station No. 24, in 1971. Upon capture, along with Santucho and other PRT-ERP leaders, he was able to escape from Rawson prison, and quickly became one of the most trusted and effective military commanders of the ERP. As the PRT-ERP was decimated, and the dictatorship took hold, he went into exile in Nicaragua to join the Sandinistas, returning to the region in 1980 to provide support and leadership for the successful assassination of former Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza, who was living in exile in Asunción, Paraguay. This action made him a legend in Latin America, one of the most admired guerrilla fighters alive. In 1985, he founded the MTP. He returned to Argentina in 1987. The MTP organised the 1989 attack on the barracks of the La Tablada Regiment – in the context of the spate of 'carapintadas' coup attempts, intended to take the fight to the armed forces, which failed to generate the expected insurrection against the military. For this, he was arrested in Mexico in 1995. He was sentenced to life imprisonment in 1996, but was pardoned in 2003. In 2005, before the legislative elections, he launched the Party for Work and Development (Partido del Trabajo y el Desarrollo – PTD), but this effort failed to gain support. He died on 22 September 2006, still politically active and on the political left, if outside of the traditional left.]

- 2 As well as Ernest Mandel, Hubert Krivine and myself, there was also the 'old man' Marcos, an Argentinian who had worked in the arms factory that the Fourth International had organised on the Moroccan border to aid the Algerian FLN. He remained in Algeria after Boumédiène's coup d'état. It was through him, met under the name of Elbio, that the young Edwy Plenel made his first contact with the Trotskyist movement.

[Probably a reference to Roberto Muniz, 1923–2012, Argentinean activist, a metal worker. He organised the arms factory based in Morocco for the Algerian FLN.

Edwy Plenel, born 1952, LCR member, journalist, editorial director of *Le Monde* (1996–2004). Founded the investigative website *Mediapart*.]

- 3 See in particular the chapter on the Santucho family in the moving book by Marta Diana, *Mujeres Guerrilleras. La militancia de los setenta en el testimonio de sus*

protagonistas femininas (Buenos Aires: Editorial Planeta, 1996). On relations between the LCR and the PRT, I was surprised to discover from the pen of the psychiatrist Miguel Benassayag, in *Che Guevara, du mythe à l'homme* (Paris: Bayard, 2003), pp. 103–5, a concoction both fantastic and slanderous.

- 4 It holds a disproportionate place, for example, in Christophe Nick's large book *Les Trotskistes* (Paris: Fayard, 2002).

10. Crying for Argentina

- 1 On his return to Brazil in the mid-1980s, Flavio became a leading light in the Workers' Party in Rio Grande do Sul, being elected senator and going on to become a member of the state government under Olivio Dutra.

[Maria-Regina Jacob Pilla, ex-wife of Paulo Antonio Paranagua. Both were militants of the POC, and of the reunified Fourth International, and exiled to Argentina after the Merino murder. When the dictatorship took power again in Argentina, both of them were saved from certain death by the intervention via the USA of the Brazilian Ambassador to Kuwait, who happened to be Paranagua's father, and who knew Edward Kennedy personally. She abandoned political activism upon her return to Brazil.

Flavio Koutzii was born in Porto Alegre, on 20 March 1943. In the late 1960s he studied Economics at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul – UFRGS), at which time he was a founding member of the POC. Forced to leave Brazil in 1970 by the military dictatorship, he went to Argentina. While there, he again faced repression and was imprisoned and tortured from 1975 to 1979. Freed thanks to an international solidarity campaign, he went into exile in France, from where he returned to Brazil in 1984. He wrote the book *Pedaços de Morte no Coração* as his sociology thesis, which he defended at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, at the Sorbonne in Paris, and which was about his experiences in the extermination camps in Argentina. He is one of the founders of the PT in the Rio Grande do Sul state, and ran for Senate in 1986, the first of many elections he would contest for the PT in the Rio Grande do Sul state, the last one in 2006. In spite of no longer being an elected official he remains a member and an adviser of the PT in Rio Grande do Sul.]

- 2 In Porto Alegre in 2002, I met some people who had been at that meeting, and we fraternally celebrated this reunion. Much water and blood had flowed under the bridge in the meantime.
- 3 Flavio Koutzii published a book in Brazil on his experience of Argentinian prisons: *Pedaços de morte no coração*.
- 4 ('Che') Daniel Pereyra, born 1929, veteran Argentinian revolutionary. Participated in the peasant movement in the valley of Convención in Peru. After the military coup of 1976, went into exile. Lives in Madrid, member of the LCR and the IA.
- 5 His adventures in Peru formed the subject of a film and a book, *Avisa los compañeros, pronto*.
- 6 Santucho's project actually continued that of Che in Bolivia. The Bolivian guerrilla seemed totally unreasonable, being a long way from the strongholds of the miners' struggles. But as emerged from later testimony (including that of Benigno), there was really an ambitious plan for a guerrilla foco at the meeting-point of Bolivia, Peru, Argentina and Chile, with a Bolivarian perspective of continent-wide liberation. The coordinating junta for the southern cone, between the Bolivian ELN, the Argentinian PRT, the Chilean MIR and the Uruguayan Tupas, was seen by Santucho in a similar perspective.

- 7 You can read here, for example: 'The couple can only be based on a relationship of integrity between its members, and on the material foundation of their social activity, the concrete role that they play in society, that of revolutionary militants. Their relationship will be harmonious and positive to the extent that they contribute to developing themselves as revolutionaries and enriching their connections to the revolutionary organization, the working class, the people and the overall revolutionary process. The couple is also a political activity.'
- 8 Paris: Gallimard, 1988.
- 9 Originally a Peronist activist with a ferocious military reputation, Baxter joined the Fourth International and was friendly with Luis Pujals. After the murder of Pujals, who was in charge of the Buenos Aires region, he advised the military groups to fire at the police on sight. In Chilean exile during the last few months of the Popular Unity government, he left for France as soon as he learned of the ban on the Ligue in Paris, to give us his material and logistic support. He died in a plane crash at Orly.

11. Restrained Violence

- 1 Despite Kagan's photos, and films that were shown clandestinely by solidarity movements. [On the night of 17 October 1961, following a large demonstration of solidarity with the FLN, the Paris police carried out a massacre of Algerians suspected of having taken part, throwing dead bodies into the Seine. The death toll is unknown, but estimates converge on a figure of around a hundred.]
- 2 José Millán-Astray, Falangist general in the Spanish civil war, famous for his slogan 'long live death'.
- 3 See Eqbal Ahmad, 'Des terrorismes', *ContreTemps* 3, February 2002.
- 4 See Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, *La Guerre hors limites* (Paris: Rivages, 2003).
- 5 See in particular his review of Ernst Jünger's *War and Warrior*. [Benjamin's article, 'Theories of German Fascism', is translated in volume 1 of Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings 1927–1930* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 320.]
- 6 Aijaz Ahmad, 'Responding with Terror', *Frontline*, October 2001.
- 7 Byron had prophetically proclaimed 'this age specialized in new inventions, destined to kill bodies and save souls, all propagated with the best of intentions'.
- 8 See Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts* (London: Verso, 2001).
- 9 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1968), p. 3.
- 10 On the 'structural violence' inherent to capital's inner logic, see in particular Bernard Guibert, *La Violence capitalisée* (Paris: Cerf, 1986).
- 11 Graham Greene, *The Quiet American* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2004), p. 142.
- 12 Graham Greene's 'quiet American', Pyle, embodies this fearsome good conscience: 'He didn't even hear what I said; he was absorbed already in the dilemmas of Democracy and the responsibilities of the West; he was determined – I learned that very soon – to do good, not to any individual in particular, but to a country, a continent, a world. Well, he was in his element now with the whole universe to improve' (ibid., p. 13). The unlimited crusade preached by George W. Bush did not just date from 11 September 2001.
- 13 On the development from total war to global war, see Daniel Bensaïd, *Walter Benjamin sentinelle messianique* (1991), *Le Pari mélancolique* (1997), *Contes et légendes de la guerre éthique* (1999) and *Le Nouvel Internationalisme* (2003).

- 14 André Suarès, *Idées et Visions* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2002), p. 440.
- 15 See my critique of Antonio Negri's book *Marx Beyond Marx* in *La Discordance des temps* (Paris: Éditions de la Passion, 1995).
- 16 The dossier compiled by *Rouge* on these liberticidal tendencies, published on the eve of 21 June 1973, was titled 'Bruits de bottes sur l'Europe'.
- 17 See Paolo Persichetti and Oreste Scalzone, *La Révolution et l'État* (Paris: Dagorno, 2000).
- 18 In 1970, the police trade union, tired of facing complaints, organised a day of explanation for the population. We immediately responded by saying that we would go and explain ourselves to the police. This was the occasion for a clandestine demonstration to try and occupy the Beaujon police station. The first ranks succeeded in entering the precinct. But whatever the intentions of this operation, it was an attack on a barracks, where weapons, etc. were stored. When the alarm was given soldiers appeared from all sides, and charged without warning. As our reinforcements were late in arriving from the Métro, our vanguard charged with keeping the doors open suffered a memorable beating.
- 19 Paolo Persichetti and Oreste Scalzone, *La Révolution et l'État*.
- 20 The shameless extradition of Paolo Persichetti in August 2002, despite the promise given in the name of the French authorities by François Mitterrand and Lionel Jospin, illustrates this 'intact rancour'.
- 21 In the early 1970s, one person was killed at Montredon-Corbières in a confrontation between winегrowers and the gendarmerie.
- 22 Daniel Bensäid, 'Les avatars d'un certain réalisme. Le Congrès de Lotta Continua', in *Quatrième Internationale*, new series, no. 21–22, spring 1975. This article discussed the role of revolutionary violence in the light of the Lotta Continua congress.
- 23 An echo of these questions is found in my book *La Révolution et le Pouvoir* (Paris: Stock, 1976); as well as in a collective volume of 1975, *Portugal: la révolution en marche*, by Daniel Bensäid, Michael Löwy and Charles-André Udry (Paris: UGE, 1975).
- 24 As well as Neuberger's book on *Armed Insurrection*, our libraries prominently featured the books of Manuel Grossi on the Asturias insurrection of 1934, George Orwell's on Catalonia in May 1937, Jan Valtin's on the failed insurrection in Hamburg in 1923, Angelo Tasca's on the rise of Italian fascism, Emilio Lussu's *La Théorie de l'insurrection*, Max Hölz's on the workers' militias in the Ruhr in the early 1920s, and of course the military writings of Trotsky, Giap and Che.
- 25 The proceedings of the Draguignan trial were published as a book, *Le Procès de Draguignan* (Paris: 10/18, 1975).
- 26 Mario Payeras wrote two books on his experience of rural and urban armed struggle in Guatemala, *Los días de la selva* and *El trueno en la ciudad*.

[Mario Payeras, born in Chimaltenango, Guatemala, 1940. As a young college student, he was a leader in the youth wing of the pro-Soviet Guatemalan Party of Labor (Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo – PGT), which allowed him to travel to the Soviet bloc for education and training (as did many such cadre of his generation). Returning to Guatemala, he co-founded and became the leading politico-military theoretician and strategist of the People's Guerrilla Army (Ejército Guerrillero del Pueblo – EGP) in 1968. The EGP was an armed split from the PGT. After a government offensive in the early 1980s decimated the EGP forces, he tried to develop an exit strategy for the EGP, which was not accepted, leading him and his supporters to leave the EGP to form a clandestine, but non-military, organisation, Revolutionary October

(Octubre Revolucionario). He also published a number of fiction, non-fiction, and fictionalised memoirs as well as poetry, becoming a broadly influential figure in Guatemalan literature, as well as a figure of some importance in Latin American literature at large. As the war in Guatemala wound down, and with Revolutionary October dwindling to a few supporters, he went into exile in Mexico, where he died in 1995 of natural causes, still in the underground.]

- 27 See Isaac Babel's '1920 Diary' and 'Reports from Petersburg, 1918', in *The Complete Works of Isaac Babel* (New York: Norton, 2001); Vladimir Zazoubrine, *Le Tchékiste* (Paris: Bourgois, 1990); also Boris Pilnyak, *The Naked Year* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1975).
- 28 See in particular Moshe Lewin, *The Soviet Century* (London: Verso, 2005).
- 29 See the account of a Red Guard, Hua Linshan, *Les Années rouges* (Paris: Seuil, 1987).
- 30 Pascal Bruckner, *The Tears of the White Man* (New York: Algora, 2002). French publication 1995.
- 31 Joffé was related to Adolf Joffe, the Bolshevik diplomat who committed suicide in 1927.
- 32 Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p. 370.
- 33 This is distinct from Trotsky's own position in *Terrorism and Communism*, a book written in the heat of civil war in the early 1920s.
- 34 This tendency is clearly perceptible in the practices of the *altermondialiste* movement and the use of methods of passive self-defence.
- 35 André Suarès, *Idées et Visions*, p. 420.

12. Colour Rouge

- 1 See Daniel Bensaïd, *Résistances, essai de taupologie générale*, a book for which Wiaz kindly agreed to draw new moles.
- 2 André Fichaut's marvellous book, *Sur le pont, Souvenirs d'un ouvrier trotskiste breton* (Paris: Syllepse, 2003) splendidly illustrates the human and moral qualities, intellectual curiosity and political courage of these militants, at a time when, socially a minority in their own movement, they had to confront in their occupational milieu both the harassment of the bosses and Stalinist ostracism.

[André Fichaut (Max), 1927–2009, employee of the EDF gasworks in Brest, secretary of its CGT union branch. A member of the Parti Communiste Internationaliste after the war, then in the LC/LCR, having carried out entryist work in the PCF. A member of the LCR central committee, he was, along with others, responsible for its industrial activity. Stood many times as a candidate in elections in Brest.

Jacques Houdet, blue-collar worker and LCR candidate in Gisors.

Roland Vacher, member of the PCI and then the LCR at Vernon. Trade unionist. Participant in the solidarity network for the Algerian FLN.]

- 3 The Ligue had two waves of factory implantation: a first in 1973 and a second from 1979.
- 4 Rico, a Toulouse tough, a poet, singer and artist, with shades of Serge Gainsbourg and Alain Bashung, whom I first met in Carcassonne in 1968, never made the slightest concession to rightmindedness and good taste. When his ailing lungs prevented him from singing, he turned to sculpture. Unable to wield a brush, he made works from recycled materials. He went through different periods: crucified Mickey Mouses, laughing cows, Gitanes packets, tarmacked roads . . . He pushed bad taste to the point of falling into an irreversible coma as a result of a routine anaesthetic. (See Daniel Bensaïd, 'En flânant sur les macadams', in *La Discordance des temps*.)

- 5 Suzette Triton, (alias Robichon), born 1947, member of the Ligue Communiste central committee. First editor of *Les Cahiers de la Taupé*, correspondent for *Rouge* from the struggle at the occupied Lip watch factory in 1973. From 1979, in the Paris Groupe Lesbiennes. Worked for the first national lesbian journal *Quand les femmes s'aiment*, as well as *Masques*, and chief editor of *Vlasta, revue des fictions et utopies amazoniennes* (1983–85), as well as working for *Lesbia*.
- 6 Now a distinguished economist, deputy for the Left Bloc, and still a member of the Fourth International.
- 7 A team of activists including Michel Rotman, Michel Lequenne, Romain Goupil and Daniel Edinger made a militant film about this experience.
[Daniel Edinger, LCR member. Actor and filmmaker.]
- 8 Sophie and I, along with Johan and Sarah Alexander (the Israeli singer), in a converted van.
- 9 *Bertxos* are improvised songs in which singers reply to each other in quatrains.
- 10 We might have obtained a reprieve thanks to the market opened up by our Rotographie printing company. *Libération*, in particular, charged us with printing a supplement of drawings that the Bazooka group made each week. Unfortunately, with the very first number the comrade printers stopped the machines and refused to print caricatures they deemed to be sexist. A vigorous debate then followed on the exercise of workers' control over press and information (an echo of the *Republica* affair in Portugal). It goes without saying that we lost the contract.
- 11 This was essentially made up of Ernest Mandel, Livio Maitan, Charles-André Udry, Charles Michaloux, Jean-Pierre Beauvais and Isabelle Richet.

[Livio Maitan, 1923–2004, having been a leader of the Italian Socialist Youth, he joined the Fourth International in 1947, becoming its joint secretary. In the leadership of the Gruppi Comunisti Rivoluzionari and then of Democrazia Proletaria, a grouping which would ultimately flow into Rifondazione Comunista (which arose from the collapse of the Partito Comunista Italiano). Author of many books and articles.

Isabelle Richet (Anna Libera), member of Ligue's leadership in the 1970s, journalist for *Rouge*, covered the Italian political situation. Member of the Executive Bureau of the FI. University professor for Paris VII.

Charles-André Udry, Swiss economist. In 1969 he left the Parti Ouvrier Populaire to co-found the Ligue Marxiste Révolutionnaire, which became the Parti Socialiste Ouvrier in 1980. From 1973 a full-timer for the Fourth International, a member of the United Secretariat. Organiser for the Mouvement pour le Socialisme, one of the organisations that emerged from the splintering of the PSO. Publishes *A l'Encontre* and *La Brèche* and edits *Page Deux*.]

- 12 See Daniel Bensaid, *Strategies of Resistance, and Who Are the Trotskyists?*, (IMG Publications, 2009).
- 13 [Subsequently a Socialist deputy, and main lieutenant of Dominique Strauss-Kahn.] And from within by Christian Phéline, Daniel Gluckstein (the Parti des Travailleurs candidate in the 2002 presidential election), Pierre Dardot and others.

[Christian Phéline, member of PSU and then LCR. Organiser of the pro-Lamberist split. Works for the Audit Office.

Daniel Gluckstein, born 1953, in the JCR in 1968, then the LC and LCR. After the expulsion of the Tendence Léniniste-Trotskyiste, in 1979 he took part in the creation of the Ligue Communiste Internationaliste, which joined the Organisation Communiste

Internationaliste (OCI) in 1980. National secretary of the Parti des Travailleurs (PT), which emerged from the OCI in 1992, and then of the Parti Ouvrier Indépendant, which followed the PT in 2008. Presidential candidate in 2002, scoring 0.47 per cent.

Pierre Dardot, member of the LCR and then the OCI. Philosopher and specialist in Hegel and Marx. His books include *Marx, prénom: Karl* (with Christian Laval) and *The New Way of the World: On Neoliberal Society* (also with Laval), forthcoming from Verso Books, 2014.]

- 14 François Fourquet had just published under this title a special issue of *Recherches*. Our own journal, *Critique Communiste*, published in December 1976 an issue (no. 11–12) on ‘militancy and everyday life’. This was the issue in which Frédérique Vinteuil’s article ‘Militancy Without Mythology’ appeared, as well as an article by Jean Nicolas on the homosexual question. Comrades from the Ligue, male and female, were also among the founders of the review *Masques*, then of CUARH (Comité d’Urgence Anti-Répression Homosexuelle). In the late 1970s, before politicians rushed to appear in Gay Pride photos, Alain Krivine regularly attended CUARH demonstrations out of solidarity, our comrades Jean Cavaillès and Jacques Fortin being among its main organisers. As for the new feminist movement in France, Ligue militants (including the gynaecologist Irène Borten, and Alexandra Weisgal) had taken part from 1970 on in the creation of groups (the Cercle Flora Tristan) and magazines (*Les Pétroleuses*, *Remue-Ménage*, forerunners of the *Cahiers du Féminisme*). *Critique Communiste* published a number of special issues, including ‘Féminisme, famille, sexualité’ (no. 4, December 1975), with articles by Denise Avenas, Sophie Oudin, Frédérique Vinteuil and Catherine Samary; then ‘Femmes, capitalisme, mouvement ouvrier’ (no. 20, December 1977), with articles by Antoine Artous, Frédérique Vinteuil and Jacqueline Heinen. I myself published a long article on ‘Corps, parole et marchandise’ in no. 17, September 1977.

[Frédérique Vinteuil (alias Monique Saliou), born 1952, graduate of the École Normale de l’Administration, specialist in history. LCR member. On the editorial committee of *Cahiers du Féminisme*. In 2002, cabinet director for the Parti Socialiste minister Jean Glavany.

Jean Nicolas, LCR member and leading figure in the organisation’s National Homosexual Commission.

Jacques Fortin, born 1945, member of the LCR then the NPA. Became involved in gay activism in 1975. Together with Jean Cavaillès, driving force behind the CUARH. Founder of the Marseille gay summer school and the journal *Masques*.

Jacqueline Heinen, sociologist, feminist. At the University of Franche-Comté then Versailles-St. Quentin en Yvelines. A member of the Ligue Marxiste Révolutionnaire (Swiss section of the USFI) then of the French LCR. One of those responsible for women’s work, before resigning in the 1980s. Published numerous texts.

Alexandra Weisgal, member of the LC and the LCR.]

- 15 Régis Debray, *Les Rendez-Vous manqués* (Paris: Seuil, 1975).
- 16 Under her real name of Monique Saliou, she was head of Jean Glavany’s office at the ministry of agriculture under the Jospin government.
- 17 See Michel Surya, *De la domination* (Tours: Farrago, 1999). For Surya, transparency is the biggest operation of ideological justification, and especially ‘the greatest police operation’ (in the Foucauldian sense of the term) ever mounted. Henri Michaux, sparing with his appearances, was equally so with curiosity, saying that seeing meant also the risk of being seen. Does a worthy life have to be invisible?

13. Duck or Rabbit?

- 1 By analogy with what Péguy called 'the intellectual party'.
- 2 *L'Allumeur du Belvédère* was the newsheet of the Bellevue lycée students in Toulouse. I was active on it from 1962 to 1964, along with Jean-Paul de Gaudemar among others.
- 3 Its name deliberately evoked the Comintern organ *Internationale Presse Korrespondenz*.
- 4 Intended for the collection 'Conversations' with Éditions Textuel.
- 5 See Jules Vallès, *L'Argent, par un homme de lettres devenu homme de Bourse*. In the same era, Jean Richepin described journalism as a 'market in letters'. Similar concerns can be found in Maupassant and Zola.
- 6 On the distinction between 'social critique' and 'artistic critique', see Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*.
- 7 Jacques Bouveresse, *Schmuck ou le Triomphe du journalisme* (Paris: Seuil, 2001).
- 8 As Lukács wrote in *History and Class Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1972): 'This structure can be seen at its most grotesque in journalism. Here it is precisely subjectivity itself, knowledge, temperament and powers of expression that are reduced to an abstract mechanism functioning autonomously and divorced both from the personality of their "owner" . . . The journalist's "lack of convictions", the prostitution of his experiences and beliefs is comprehensible only as the apogee of capitalist reification' (p. 100). The journalist that Arthur Schnitzler presents in *Fink und Fliederbusch*, who simultaneously writes two conflicting versions of the same news story for two competing papers, is the caricature of this process of commodity abstraction through which the journalist becomes the organ and appendix of the paper he supposedly writes.
- 9 Expressed in both the United States and France by the success of denunciatory criticism, in the strong sales of Serge Halimi's pamphlet *Les nouveaux chiens de garde* or Pierre Bourdieu's *On Television*, as well as in tumultuous editorials on the evolution of *Le Monde*.
- 10 See the experience of the *Rheinische Zeitung*, of which Marx became editor in 1842. It is interesting to note how, in a different transition period, journalism served as an emergency exit from the academy, and a gangway between philosophy and politics, for both Nizan and Politzer.
- 11 1) The first duty of journalism is truth. 2) There is first of all a duty of loyalty towards citizens. 3) The essence of this is the duty of verification. 4) Its agents must take care to preserve their independence towards those whom they deal with. 5) Journalism must be an independent and vigilant overseer of power. 6) It must constitute a forum of public criticism. 7) It must aim at information that is comprehensible and proportionate. 8) Its agents must be able to cite their conscience clause – etc.
- 12 Bouygues runs TF1 and LCI. Lagardère is involved in Europe 1; Hachette in *Le Journal de Dimanche*, *Paris Match*, *Le Monde*; Vivendi in Canal+ and M6; Oréal in *Marie Claire*; Louis Vuitton in *La Tribune*; Les Chargeurs Réunis in *Libération*. Investors like this are far from disinterested philanthropists.
[Martin Bouygues, born 1952, head of a French industrial conglomerate founded by his father, centred on construction but also involved in telecoms, off-shore platforms, and media.
Arnaud Lagardère, born 1961, head of a media group active in thirty countries, including, in France, the publications *Elle*, *Paris-Match*, *Télé7jours*, *Le Journal du Dimanche* the radio stations *Europe n°1*, *Virgin Radio*, *RFM* and TV station *Gulli*. In December 2011, Qatar Holdings became its principal shareholder.]

13 *Die Fackel*, no. 613–621, 1923.

14 In the wake of the First World War, Valéry already felt the same need, but wisely added the vexing question: 'But what is a fact?'

14. Once Upon a Time, There'll Be . . .

1 Michel Foucault, *Dits et Écrits* II, p. 408. He very likely had in mind the work of the group Socialisme ou Barbarie (Castoriadis, Lefort, Lyotard), or the roles of Félix Guattari and Lucien Sebag in the *La Voie communiste* tendency of the late 1950s.

2 See Francisco Fernandez Buey, *Marx (sin ismos)* (Barcelona: Editorial Viejo Topo, 1998).

3 Lucio Colletti, *Le Déclin du marxisme* (Paris: PUF, 1980).

4 Cited by Michel Foucault in 'Useless to Revolt?', *Power* (Penguin: London, 2002), p. 450.

5 See Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

6 For a critique of this rhetoric of postmodernism, see Daniel Bensaïd, *Les Irréductibles* (Paris: Textuel, 2000).

7 See Jean-Paul Dollé, *L'ordinaire n'existait plus* (Paris: Léo Scheer, 2001).

8 On this controversy, poorly served in France, see in particular Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism. The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1992), *The Cultural Turn* (London: Verso, 1998) and *A Singular Modernity* (London: Verso, 2002), David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity* (London: Verso, 1998), Terry Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), Alex Callinicos, *Against Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Polity, 1989), Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Retreat from Class* (London: Verso, 1986), and Ellen Meiksins Wood and John Bellamy Foster (eds), *In Defense of History: Marxism and the Postmodern Agenda* (New York: Monthly Review, 1996).

9 Georges-Hubert de Radkowski, *Les Jeux du désir* (reissue) (Paris: PUF, 2002).

10 Agnes Heller, *The Theory of Need in Marx* (London: Allison and Busby, 1976).

11 André Gorz, *Farewell to the Proletariat* (London: Pluto, 1982).

12 This remark incautiously mixes two distinct questions. On the one hand, that of the very use of the notion of subject as applied to the process of history; on the other, that of a structural analogy between bourgeois revolutions (or simply, conditions in which the bourgeoisie develops and establishes its hegemony) and social revolutions (in which the oppressed classes experience the iron fetter of alienation and commodity reification).

13 See above, p. 92.

14 'The plebs certainly has no sociological reality', Foucault wrote, but there is a definite centrifugal moment: 'The plebs does not exist, but there is the plebeian, that plebeian side' (*Dits et Écrits* II, p. 421). The concept of multitude popularised by Toni Negri claims the legacy of Deleuze and Foucault (and beyond this, of Spinoza). It is situated in a discursive formation in which the multitude is the new plebs of the new empire.

15 *Critical Companion to Contemporary Marxism*, edited by Jacques Bidet and Stathis Kouvelakis (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2009).

- 16 Trotsky, Gramsci, José Carlos Mariategui, Karl Korsch, Ernst Bloch, the late Lukács, the late Althusser, as well as Henri Lefebvre, Lucien Goldmann and Ernest Mandel.

15. *E agora, Zé?*

- 1 During the last days before the fall of the Berlin Wall, two of our comrades from Socialist Democracy, the Brazilian section of the Fourth International, were in East Berlin attending a training course. From one day to the next, they saw the bureaucracy charged with explaining to them the mysteries of the dialectic fall to pieces, ending up in a flood of tears.
- 2 In the 1950s and 60s, the UN economic commission for Latin America inspired a theory of development based on reformist Keynesian-type intervention and a degree of protectionism.
- 3 These included Tariq Ali, Gilbert Achcar and Michel Lequenne. The majority position was subjected to self-criticism in due form the following year.
- 4 *Pelego*: Literally, 'saddle-cover' (the blanket that is put between the horse's back and the saddle). This was the name given to trade-union leaders who were often appointed by the minister of labour, who under the labour legislation could suspend an elected leader and appoint an '*interventor*'. The president of the official engineering workers' union of São Paulo, Joaquim (or Joaquinazao), was the archetype of this yellow mafioso bureaucrat in the 1970s and 80s.
- 5 Originating from the state of Minas Gerais.
- 6 Marco Aurelio Garcia was subsequently special adviser on foreign policy to President Lula.
- 7 The POC, which included as members Raul Pont, Michael Löwy, Paolo Paranagua, Emir Sader, Marco Aurelio Garcia, Celso Castro, Eduardo Merlino and Flavio Koutzii. [Emir Sader (born 1943), sociologist and university professor. Member of the Brazilian POC in the 1960s. One of the organisers of the World Social Forum. Director of CLACSO (Latin American Council for the Social Sciences)
Marco Aurelio Garcia (born 1941), historian and university professor. Member of the Brazilian POC in 1960s. Co-founder of the PT and of Democracia Socialista's organ *Em Tempo*. Coordinator of the electoral campaigns for Lula and Dilma Rousseff. Was found guilty and condemned to several years prison in the 'mensalao' corruption scandal.]
- 8 These included Waldemar Rossi, the worker chosen to present the list of workers' demands during the visit of Pope John Paul II, and also Vito Gianotti.
[Waldemar Rossi, metal-workers' trade unionist in São Paulo (Metal-Workers' Union Opposition. Pastoral coordinator for the archdiocese of São Paulo.)]
- 9 At the World Social Forum of 2002, Lucio Costa gave me as a relic a duplicated copy in Portuguese of *Mai 68, répétition générale*, which he had spent nights stapling together under the dictatorship.
- 10 I still have by my desk a lithograph of the famous couple silk-screened by prisoners.
- 11 As well as *The War of the End of the World* by Mario Vargas Llosa.
- 12 Shortly after, Zé Correa became one of the leaders of Socialist Democracy and from 2001 was a principal organiser of the World Social Forum.
[José Correa Leite (Zé Correa), member of Democracia Socialista and then of PSOL. Active in the World Social Forum.]

- 13 In homage to him, the Brazilian comrades gave the name Isaac Axelrud to their education and research foundation.
- 14 Today running the Zapatista journal *Rebeldia*.
[Sergio Rodríguez Lascano, during the 1968 student struggles he emerged as a leader of a High School Struggle committee. He was a long-standing militant of the the Mexican Section of the reunified Fourth International, the Workers' Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores – PRT). When the Zapatista movement emerged, he moved in their direction. He is now the editor of the *Rebeldia* magazine, closely aligned with the Zapatista National Liberation Front (FZLN), of which he is also a founding member, and is considered a close adviser to Subcomandante Marcos as well as a leading theoretician and propagandist of the FZLN.]
- 15 Francisco Louça, Christopher Aguiton, Jeanette Habel and Éric Toussaint, the founder of the International Committee for the Abolition of Third-World Debt.
[Eric Toussaint, political scientist and historian, president of Belgium's CADTM (Comité pour l'annulation de la dette du tiers monde; Committee for the Abolition of Third World Debt). A member of the research council of the French ATTAC (and the Belgian ATTAC's research network), of the international council of the World Social Forum, and the international committee of the USFI and its Belgian section (LCR/SAP). A member of the presidential commission which carried out a full audit of Ecuador's debts.]
- 16 In 2003, Heloísa was the most popular woman politician in the country, ahead of Lula's wife Marisa and the mayor of São Paulo, Marta Suplicy.
- 17 The sociologist Chico de Oliveira, the philosopher Leandro Konder, the Gramsci specialist Carlos Nelson Coutinho and the former deputy Milton Temer. Heloísa also received wide support through the press, from the liberation theologian Leonardo Boff to the senator Eduardo Suplicy, as well as the essayist Emir Sader. An international protest petition signed by personalities such as Noam Chomsky, Ken Loach, and several parliamentarians and leaders of trade unions and NGOs, was sent to the PT leadership. In vain – cynical reason had triumphed.
- 18 As far as agrarian reform is concerned, due to the lack of credit, only some 15,000 landless families were settled in 2003 against 60,000 announced. In November 2003, the four-year reform plan was made public by Miguel Rosetto, in the presence of Lula, on the occasion of a landless march in Brasília. The plan foresaw the establishment of 400,000 families between then and 2006, as well as the improvement of land on which 150,000 families were already settled. Without amounting to a revolution in social relations on the land in a country of Brazil's dimensions, this reform did affect around two million people. A quadrupling of the ministerial budget was also announced. It remains to be seen whether, in a context of continued budgetary austerity, this commitment will be kept by the ministries of economics and finance.
- 19 *Le Monde*, 12 September 2003.
- 20 Interview in *Punto Final*, 29 July 1973. In spring of that year, the LCR warned against the seditious drift of the Chilean right, in a pamphlet titled *Chili: le socialisme sans la révolution?* A further pamphlet, dated 16 September, drew the first lessons of the coup d'état only days after the event.
- 21 Interview with Luis Corvalán in the *Nouvelle Revue internationale*, December 1972.
- 22 Questioned on the first months of the Lula government, Joseph Stiglitz, Nobel prize-winner in 2001, former director of the World Bank and adviser to President Clinton,

declared (and he knows what he's talking about!): 'Everyone is both happy and disappointed. Happy that the markets have confidence again in Brazil. Lula has shown that he can govern like any right-wing government. That's a success. It means avoiding damage caused by the financial markets. But there is a risk: you can try and please the financial markets and they give you just enough room to manoeuvre to make you believe that perhaps, if you gave them just a bit more . . . And, before you really know the answer, four or five years have gone by. You're no longer in government, the financial markets are hardly satisfied – or then they're still a bit grouchy – and you didn't have space to do what you were elected to do.' (Interview published in *Libération*, 25 October 2003.)

16. Spectres of the Blue House

- 1 Francisco Louça later gave this title to a scholarly book written together with Chris Freeman: *As Time Goes By: From the Industrial Revolution to the Information Revolution* (Oxford: OUP, 2001).
- 2 We were amused to learn later that Liddell Hart, the great theorist of dynamic defence, was a distant relative of Christophe Aguiton.
- 3 *Pelon* = bald.
- 4 The Yuki Indians have reputedly never been defeated in their conflicts with the Mexican state. To put an end to an interminable war, Lázaro cárdenas had to negotiate a peace of the brave with their chiefs.
- 5 The graphic artist who particularly inspired Diego Rivera.
- 6 Rebel and untamed like a wild horse.
- 7 See Charles Plisnier, *Memoirs of a Secret Revolutionary*. Translated by Geoffrey Dunlop (London: Boriswood, 1938); Elizabeth Poretsky, *Our Own People; A Memoir of 'Ignace Reiss' and His Friends* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1970); Victor Serge, *Unforgiving Years*, (New York: New York Review, 2008).
- 8 On Aragon's role at the Kharkov congress, see in particular André Thirion, *Révolutionnaires sans révolution* (Arles: Actes Sud, 1999), especially chapter 18 on the Kharkov congress or the hand of Moscow. Also on Aragon, see the pamphlet by the author of *Les Javanais*, Jean Malaquais: *Le nommé Louis Aragon ou le patriote professionnel* (Paris: Syllepse, 1998), and Dionys Mascolo, *Lettre polonaise sur la misère intellectuelle en France* (Paris: Minuit, 1957).
- 9 These included Natalia, Frida, Jan Frankel, Jean Van Heijenoort, Albert Goldman, and for the commission John Dewey, John Finerty, Otto Rühle and Francisco Zamora.
[Jan Frankel, 1905–?, born into an Austrian–Jewish family, from a young man a member of the Czech Communist Youth. Became a Trotskyist, taking part in the first international conference of the Left Opposition in Paris in 1930. Served in Trotsky's secretariat at Prinkipo, before helping Trotsky's 1932 passage to Copenhagen. An organiser of the clandestine Left Opposition groups, he then went to Mexico in 1937, following soon after Trotsky. Served on the Dewey commission. Sided with Shachtman and Burnham in the 1939–40 US Trotskyist dispute, joining the Workers' Party. Soon disappeared from all political activity.]

Albert Goldman, 1897–1960, a member of the IWW and Communist Party before being expelled as a Trotskyist. A lawyer, Goldman defended the Minneapolis Teamsters in 1934 (during a long-running strike led by Trotskyists) as well as the SWPers inculpated under the WWII-era Smith Act – indeed, himself being

imprisoned alongside the defendants. Left the SWP to join the Workers' Party in 1946, then joined the Socialist Party USA in 1948.

John Dewey, 1859–1952, left-liberal philosopher and progressive educationalist.

John Finerty, a liberal, was the legal counsel to the Dewey commission, and cross-examined Trotsky during the 'trial'. He was already well-known for his defence of Sacco and Vanzetti, Italian anarchist migrant workers executed after a highly dubious murder trial.

Otto Rühle, 1873–1943, co-founder of Germany's Spartakusbund, the revolutionary-internationalist opponents of the First World War. A prominent left communist, he argued that the party form used by the Bolsheviks indicated the bourgeois character of the Russian Revolution, and advocated a socialism centred on workers' councils. Member of the Dewey commission.

Francisco Zamora, a Mexican trade unionist, journalist and economist who sat on the Dewey commission.]

10 Leon Trotsky, *The Crimes of Stalin* (1937).

11 Trotsky's *Their Morals and Ours* was published in *New Internationalist* in June 1938. Dewey's response appeared there in August the same year, under the title 'Means and Ends: Their Interdependence, and Leon Trotsky's Essay on Their Morals and Ours'. If 'the end flows from the historical movement', the philosopher concludes, then 'the principle of interdependence of means and end has disappeared or at least been submerged': 'The selection of class struggle as a means has to be justified, on the ground of the interdependence of means and end, by an examination of actual consequences of its use, not deductively. Historical considerations are certainly relevant to this examination. But the assumption of a *fixed* law of social development is not relevant . . . It is one thing to say that class struggle is a means of attaining the end of the liberation of mankind. It is a radically different thing to say that there is an absolute *law* of class struggle which determines the means to be used . . .' In a certain sense, then, Dewey proves more intransigent than Trotsky on the principle of immanence.

12 Impossible love echoes as a leitmotiv right through *Under the Volcano*. See on this, Christine Pagnoulle, *Malcolm Lowry. Voyage au fond de nos abîmes* (Lausanne: L'Âge d'Homme, 1977). See also Lucien Goldmann's fine article on Jean-Paul Godard's film *Le Mépris*: 'Peut-on encore aimer dans un monde sans dieux?' [See *Cultural Creation in Modern Society*, trans. Bart Grahl, intro. by William Mayrl; Appendices and Bibliography by I. Rodriguez and Marc Zimmerman (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1976).]

13 Samuel Beckett, *Endgame*.

14 See Anita Burdman Feferman, *From Trotsky to Gödel: The Life of Jean van Heijenoort* (Natick: A. K. Peters, 1993).

15 Samuel Beckett, *Endgame*.

16 1948 Preface to *Under the Volcano*.

17. Whirlwinds

1 In a book published before the fall of the Wall, I wrote, attacking the Thermidorean priests of the bicentennial of the French Revolution: 'You live in the precarious illusion of arrested time, on the pretext that this small and old continent, cut in two for half a century, seems to have reached a definitive equilibrium. An illusion that sees the plateau as a plain. You lack distance. I know the price of this apparent and superficial peace. In less than forty years of wars and revolutions, Europe was the most affected,

the most lacerated of continents. And I already hear creaking at its edges and subterranean rumbling at its centre.' *Moi, la Révolution. Remembrances d'une bicentenaire indigne* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989).

- 2 Over the years, Jeanette Habel, Jaqueline Heinen, Penny Duggan, Claude Jacquin and Gilbert Achcar arrived to strengthen the group. Michel Rovère, John Barzman (son of the blacklisted Hollywood scriptwriter) and Vincent Kermel were successively in charge of publishing *Inprecor*. For the whole of the decade, Nicole Geneste efficiently coordinated the team.

[Penelope Duggan, formerly a member of the British section of the FI. In the LCR then NPA, a member of the executive of the USFI. In charge of the USFI's women's work, in particular feminist education at the Amsterdam IIRE. Repeat candidate in local and national elections.

Nicole Geneste, responsible for much of the secretarial and administrative duties of the FI in the 1970s and 1980s.

Claude Jacquin (alias Gabriel), civil engineer. For a long time worked on *Afrique en Lutte* ('Africa in Struggle', an LCR organ) and one of those charged with its immigrants commission. Also worked on *Inprecor*, organ of the USFI. Published a book on Angola, also an expert on works commissions.

Vincent Kermel, LCR member, journalist for the daily *Rouge*. Together with Claude Jacquin/Gabriel, published two books on New Caledonia and its independence struggle.]

- 3 Belgian Trotskyist, author of a standard work on *La Conception matérialiste de la question juive* (Paris: EDI, 1968). Abraham Léon died in a Nazi camp.
- 4 When Ernest devoted several weeks in the mid-1980s to writing his essay on the detective story, *Delightful Murder: A Social History of the Crime Story* (London: Pluto Press, 1984), Perry Anderson wrote to him expressing indignation that he should be spending precious time on Hercule Poirot when Marxism was under siege from all sides.
- 5 'Dear Leon Davidovich, we are united by ten years of common work, and I also believe, ties of friendship; and this gives me the right, at the moment of separation, to tell you what strikes me in you as a weakness [. . .]. It has always seemed to me that you lacked that inflexibility and intransigence that Lenin demonstrated, that ability to remain alone if need be and continue in the same direction [. . .]. You have always been right politically since 1905, but you have often departed from the correct position in search of a unification and compromise whose value you overestimated [. . .]. I often wanted to tell you what I have just done, but I only decided to do so at the moment when I bid you farewell.' There can be no doubt that the Trotsky of the 1930s, Leninist to excess, was seeking to conjure away the presence within him of this double.
- 6 Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas had been scandalously deprived of a likely victory.
- 7 The ration card that gives entitlement to basic staples.
- 8 See Jorge Masetti, *La Loi des corsairs* (Paris: Stock, 1993).
- 9 Ernest Mandel died in summer 1996.
- 10 This formula was proposed by the Italian Communist leader Enrico Berlinguer. He thereby took account of the historical turn in his own way and for his own reasons.
- 11 Daniel Bensaïd, *Moi, la Révolution* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989). Two years later, in 1991, before the new Balkan wars, I wrote once again, in *Jeanne de guerre lasse* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991): 'There is no unusable costume, no definitive maps. Seams always end up splitting, the earth ends up shaking its badly cut borders. An old order collapses before a new one has time to take shape. That does not happen in a pleasant way. The

path to a new equilibrium presupposes first of all tremendous disorder, wars and revolutions, that will define the new hierarchies of domination and dependence. There is no smooth glide from one era to another.'

- 12 *Jeanne de guerre lasse* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), p. 167.
- 13 My unsubjugated bicentenary irreverently challenged François Mitterrand as master of ceremonies. When I delivered the manuscript, Gallimard required some twenty pages of cuts on the legal advice of Maître Kiejman's office. I have kept this censorship order dictated by a zealous courtier, with the passages to be suppressed underlined. There was no question of giving in, only of abandoning publication. Edwy was intractable and threatened to resign as series editor. Over a weekend, he obtained the agreement of another publisher to take on the book, with the cuts required by Gallimard in italics. This ridiculous business reached the ears of Mitterrand, and the book appeared without amputation.
- 14 These included coordinating three of the Ligue's manifestos. That of 1972, *Ce que veut la Ligue communiste* (Paris: Maspero, 1972), was written in two days and a night by a small team (Charles Michaloux, Clovisse Versa, Michel Rotman, Jean-Marc Rosenfeld and me). I coordinated the 1978 manifesto together with Paul Alliès, *Oui le socialisme* (Paris: Maspero, 1978), a voluminous work that sought to be exhaustive. That of 1991, *À gauche du possible* (Paris: La Brèche), was a response to the change of period that followed the fall of the Berlin Wall.
- 15 In 1984, we were charged with arranging in the Black Forest the first European camp of the Fourth International's youth organizations. Fearing a raid by the French forces stationed in the region, we had set up a system of alarm and surveillance, both day and night, complete with watchtowers and siren. On one side, the camp overlooked a steep wooded slope. To save on guards, Christophe had the idea of stretching wires between the trees, which would detonate fireworks to give the alarm in case of any intruder. It needed hundreds of metres of wire and hundreds of rockets. We spent a whole day combing the joke shops in the surrounding villages, and straining to make ourselves understood in a summary German what we were looking for. Without success, of course.
- 16 The writer Jean-Paul Clébert, our brother-in-law by marriage, took refuge in the Luberon long before this became fashionable. In the 1950s, terrified by the success of his book *Paris insolite*, he retired to a farmhouse there.
- 17 André Suarès, *Idées et Visions* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2002).
- 18 I used some of these synopses in *Jeanne de guerre lasse*.
- 19 And the dialogue between history and memory on which my Walter Benjamin book ends.

18. The Marrano Enigma

- 1 My uncle Jules died in Dachau. Any trace of my uncle René, a notoriously quarrelsome rebel, is lost after his arrival at the Saint-Michel prison in Toulouse, where he was probably beaten to death by Obersturmführer Karl-Heinz Müller's men. Marcou, Reine and Roger's younger brother, managed to escape the Gestapo's net, and called his first son Roger after his dead brother. This young relative, outwardly charming and smart, killed himself in the summer of 2003. Perhaps he had buried deep within him the wound of having to substitute for his dead uncle.
- 2 The case of such great cultural half-breeds, from Montaigne to Proust, deserves special study.
- 3 Isaac Deutscher, *The Non-Jewish Jew* (Oxford: OUP 1968), p. 40.

- 4 See Norman Geras, 'Marxists before the Holocaust', in *The Legacy of Ernest Mandel* (London: Verso, 1999), p. 191ff. Enzo Traverso has worked on an anthropological-historical interpretation of Nazi violence: *The Origins of Nazi Violence* (New York: The New Press, 2003).
- 5 Monsters are supposed neither to reproduce nor repeat themselves, but the inversion of the exception and the rule makes monstrosity commonplace. On this reversal, see Richard Matheson, *I Am Legend* (New York: Orb, 1997 [1954]).
- 6 She ignored of course the leading roles in the Ligue played by Gérard Verbizier, Jean Métais, Alain Bobbio and Pierre Rousset.
[Jean Métais (Joël), seminary student, then a health and safety inspector. Was on the LC's political bureau and in the Renault cell at Elbeuf. Full-timer in charge of industrial work. Stand-in candidate in Bordeaux at the 1970 elections. In 2005, became *département* director of work and employment in Hauts-de-Seine.]
- 7 On Henri Curiel, see the superb biography by Gilles Perrault, *Un homme à part* (Paris: Barrault, 1984).
- 8 Nathan Weinstock, *Zionism: False Messiah* (London: Ink Links, 1979). Nathan Weinstock, born 1939. Belgian lawyer, active from the 1960s to 80s in Hashomer Hatzair, Matzpen and the Belgian section of the USFI. Wrote on the Arab revolutionary movement and on the history of the Jewish workers' movement in Europe, but later repudiated his anti-Zionism.]
- 9 Letter of 26 June 1930.
- 10 Isaac Deutscher, *The Non-Jewish Jew*, p. 50.
- 11 Maxime Rodinson, *Israel: A Colonial-Settler State?* (New York: Monad, 1973). [Maxime Rodinson, 1915–2004, historian of religion and fluent speaker of Arabic, Hebrew, Turkish and Ge'ez. A PCF member until 1958, he remained a Marxist and anti-Zionist. Wrote notable works on Mohammed, Islam and capitalism and Marxism and the Muslim world.]
- 12 See Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Spinoza et autres hérétiques* (Paris: Seuil, 1991).
- 13 Benny Lévy, *Être juif*, p. 115.
- 14 See Michel Warschawski, *Israël-Palestine, le défi bi-national* (Paris: Textuel, 2001), with a critical commentary by Elias Sanbar.
- 15 This turning point was emphasised by a resolution of the executive committee of the Fourth International, drafted in collaboration with the Lebanese Gilbert Achcar and the Israeli Michel Warschawski.
- 16 This appeal, published in *Le Monde* on 18 October 2000, was signed among others by Francis Kahn, Rony Brauman, Pierre Vidal-Naquet, Marie-Claire Mendès-France, Gisèle Halimi, Daniel Singer, Laurent Schwartz, Stanislas Tomkiewicz, Hubert Krivine, Maurice Rajfus, Michael Löwy, Janette Habel, Michèle Sibony, Pierre Khalfa, Samy and Isaac Johsua, Henri Maler, Richard Wagman, Olivia Zemor and Eyal Sivan. It had several hundred signatures in all.
[Stanislas Tomkiewicz (1925–2003). Member of the PCF until 1972. Child psychiatrist.]
- 17 Without coordination, similar appeals were made in Great Britain, Canada, the United States and Australia. In parallel, too, on the initiative of Richard Wagman, Michèle Sibony and a small militant core (including Jean-Claude Meyer in Strasbourg), a courageous Union des Juifs pour la Paix was formed, a minority but very active.
- 18 Published in *Le Monde* on 19 November 2000, this appeal was signed in particular by Adonis, Tahar Ben Jelloun, Fethi Benslama, Djamel Bouras, Mohammed Harbi, Camille Mansour and Amir Rikabi.
- 19 See David Bakan, *Freud et la tradition mystique juive* (Paris: Payot, 1977).

19. The Gymnastics of the Possible

- 1 'Great leader', see notes, p. 331.
- 2 In this dilettantist exploration, I profited from the enlightened research of Michael Löwy, my old accomplice in messianic heresies, and of Enzo Traverso. See in particular Michael Löwy, *Utopie et Rédemption* (Paris: PUF, 1988), and *Fire Alarm: Reading Walter Benjamin's 'On the Concept of History'* (London: Verso, 2006); Enzo Traverso *The Marxists and the Jewish Question* (New York: Humanities Press, 1994), *L'Histoire déchirée* (Paris: Cerf, 1997), and *La Pensée dispersée* (Paris: Lignes, 2003).
- 3 Distinguishing between messianic character and a messianism polluted by theology, Derrida stresses that the expectation matters more than the expected, to the point of excluding the rendezvous that would attenuate the impromptu character of the event.
- 4 See Françoise Proust, *Kant, le ton de l'histoire* (Paris: Payot, 1991), p. 290.
- 5 Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005 [1921]).
- 6 Walter Benjamin, 'Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century', in *Reflections*, ed. Peter Demetz (New York: Schocken, 1986).
- 7 José Carlos Mariategui, in an article published in *Variedades*, Lima in 1926. The Peruvian revolutionary had read Sorel and Péguy in the course of his visit to Italy. His conception of historical temporality, sharpened by the concern to understand the dialectic of uneven development and the non-contemporaneity of cultures, favoured this reception of the enigmas of a past that had still not disappeared.

20. A Thousand (and One) Marxisms

- 1 Gérard Granel, preface to Husserl's *La Crise des sciences européennes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989).
- 2 Maurice Blanchot, 'Les trois paroles de Marx', in *L'Amitié* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971).
- 3 One of these was Stavros Tombazos, a Cypriot, Hellenist and Germanist, nourished on dialectic, whose remarkable essay on *Les Temps du Capital* I edited (Paris: Cahiers des Saisons, 1996).
- 4 Not always so courteous, all the same. In 1977, *Les Cahiers de Yenan*, published by Maspero under the editorship of Alain Badiou and Sylvain Lazarus, responded to the publication of Deleuze's *Rhizome* by denouncing this 'potato fascism'. See 'La situation actuelle sur le front de la philosophie', *Cahiers de Yenan*, no. 4. Badiou has since corrected such excesses, particularly in a book of posthumous homage, *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999). Yet the philosophy department of Paris-VIII had more in common than we imagined, if only a shared aversion towards the 'new philosophers' and political philosophy with the flavour of Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut.
- 5 My friendly collaboration with Olivier Bétourné continued with the publication of *Le Pari mélancolique* (Paris: Fayard, 1997), *Qui est le juge?* (Paris: Fayard, 1999) and *Résistances* (Paris: Fayard, 2001). He was always an attentive and vigilant reader and a pertinent critic, for which I am grateful.
- 6 See Daniel Lindenberg, *Le Marxisme introuvable* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1975). The positivism that deeply pervaded French socialism defused the bombshell of critique in favour of a genealogy of progressive reason, leading from Condorcet to Guesde and

Lafargue, via Saint-Simon, Comte and Durkheim. This socialism saw itself as the organic and necessary fulfilment of the promises of 1789. The critique of historical reason was relegated to the margins of the growing workers' movement, reserved for outsiders such as Blanqui, Sorel, Péguy and Gabriel Tarde. To be convinced of the contrary character of this positivist reason of Marx, it is only necessary to recall Marx's contempt for Comte, 'lamentable compared with Hegel', and 'this shitty positivism'. 'As a Party man I have a thoroughly hostile attitude towards Comte's philosophy, while as a scientific man I have a very poor opinion of it . . .' (Marx to Edward Beesly, 12 June 1871; *MECW*, vol. 44, p. 150). Faith in an abstract, continuous and universal progress, in fact, has little in common with the contradictions, intermittencies and ambivalences of historical progress as conceived by the author of *Capital*.

- 7 The evolution of Georges Politzer in France, the banning of Vygotsky and critical ecologists (Vernadsky, Stachinsky) in the Soviet Union, illustrate this sinister involution eloquently enough.
- 8 The manuscripts of the *Grundrisse* were not published until 1939 in Russia, and not until 1967 in France.
- 9 While Trotsky combined an acute strategic sense of the conjuncture (amazingly so in his writings on Germany), the theme of delay played a growing role with some of his heirs, such as Ernest Mandel. The contradiction then became explosive, between objective conditions, which continued to ripen, and a 'subjective factor' that fell ever more behind on the clock of history.
- 10 For example, in the 1960s, the books of Ernest Mandel, Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy, André Gunder Frank and André Gorz.
- 11 Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London: Verso, 1977) and *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism* (London: Verso, 1983).
- 12 See György Markus, *Language and Production: A Critique of the Paradigms* (Boston, MA: Springer Publishers, 1986).
- 13 With a few exceptions. The most notable, in the 1960s and 70s, was that of Ernest Mandel, followed by the works of Pierre Dockès and Bernard Rosier, *Rythmes économiques* (Paris: La Découverte, 1983), then, among others, those of Giovanni Arrighi and Robert Brenner in the United States, and in Portugal, Francisco Louça, *Turbulence in Economics* (London: Edward Elgar, 1997).
- 14 Supplement to *Critique*, no. 24, May 1977, reprinted in Gilles Deleuze, *Deux régimes de fous. Textes et entretiens 1975–1995*, ed. David Lapoujade (Paris: Les éditions de Minuit, 2003).
- 15 Marxist historiography in the English-speaking world was particularly illustrated by the works of George Rudé, Eric Hobsbawm, E. P. Thompson, Isaac Deutscher and Christopher Hill. This fertility was certainly due in part to the relative weakness of Stalinism in Britain and the United States. The vitality of philosophical Marxism is particularly illustrated by the works of Perry Anderson, Fredric Jameson, Marshall Berman, Terry Eagleton and David Harvey. There is also a substantial Marxist critique directly engaged in political activity: Alex Callinicos, Robert Brenner, Ellen Meiksins Wood, John Bellamy Foster, Tony Smith, etc.
- 16 See in particular Jean Robelin, *Marxisme et Socialisation* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1989); Michel Vadée, *Marx penseur du possible* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1992); Jacques Bidet, *Théorie de la modernité* (Paris: Actuel Marx, 1992); Henri Maler, *Convoiter l'impossible* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995); Antoine Artous, *Marx, l'État et la Politique* (Paris: Syllepse, 1999) and *Travail et Émancipation sociale* (Paris: Syllepse, 2002); Stathis Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution: From Kant to Marx* (London: Verso, 2003);

- Georges Labica, *Démocratie et Révolution* (Paris: Le Temps des cerises, 2003); Gérard Duménil and Dominique Lévy, *Crise et Sortie de crise* (Paris: Actuel Marx, 2000); François Chesnais, *La Mondialisation financière* (Paris: La Découverte, 1996); Michel Husson, *Misère du capital* (Paris: Syros, 1996); Jacques Texier, *Révolution et Démocratie chez Marx et Engels* (Paris: Actuel Marx, 1998); André Tosel, *Vers un communisme de la finitude* (Paris: Kimé, 1966) and *L'Esprit de scission* (Besançon: Belles Lettres, 1991); Jean-Marie Vincent, *Un autre Marx* (Lausanne: Page 2, 2001). Or again, Karel Kosik, *The Crisis of Modernity*, ed. James Satterwhite (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1994), and Istvan Mészáros, *Beyond Capital* (London: Merlin Press, 1995).
- 17 See Daniel Bensaid, *Karl Marx. Les hiéroglyphes de la modernité* (Paris: Textuel, 2001).
- 18 See André Tosel's contribution to *Critical Companion to Contemporary Marxism*, eds. Jacques Bidet and Stathis Kouvelakis (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2009).

21. The Inaudible Thunder

- 1 Until the publication in Roman Rosdolsky's *The Making of Marx's Capital* (London: Pluto, 1977; French edition 1976), attention was scarcely paid in France to the architecture of *Capital*. Since then, several studies have enriched this knowledge, including those of Enrique Dussel on the successive drafts.
- 2 See Henryk Grossmann, 'Marx, classical political economy and the problem of dynamics', *Capital and Class* 2, Summer 1977, pp. 32–55 and 3, Autumn 1977, pp. 67–99; and Stavros Tombazos, *Les Temps du capital* (Paris: Cahiers des Saisons, 1996) [forthcoming from the Historical Materialism Book Series published by Brill Academic Press].
- 3 See Bernard Guibert, *La Violence capitalisée* (Paris: Le Cerf, 1996).
- 4 See Daniel Bensaid, *Un monde à changer* (Paris: Textuel, 2003).
- 5 In Michel Vadée's fine formulation.
- 6 Frederick Engels, *Anti-Dühring. MECW*, vol. 25, p. 244ff.
- 7 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Adventures of the Dialectic*, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973); Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon* (New York: Random House, 2011 [1940]).
- 8 Auguste Blanqui, *L'Éternité par les astres* (Paris: La Tête de feuille, 1972).
- 9 Particular examples would be Joseph Schumpeter, Raymond Aron and Ralf Dahrendorf.
- 10 'Whatever shortcomings they may have, the advantage of my writings is that they are an artistic whole, and this can only be achieved through my practice of never having things printed until I have them in front of me in their entirety.' (Letter to Engels, 31 July 1865. *MECW*, vol. 42, p. 173.)
- 11 Ernst Bloch stresses that tendency is not a 'thwarted law', but rather 'the mode in which the content of a goal that does not yet exist makes itself prevail': *Experimentum Mundi* (Lausanne: Payot, 1981), p. 138. Gramsci grasped very well the importance of this notion of tendential law, asking in the *Prison Notebooks*: 'Does the discovery of the formal logic principle of the law of tendency not imply a new immanence?' With the notion of tendential law, 'economic contradiction becomes political, and is resolved politically by a reversal of practice'. All those who have claimed to deduce from the law of the tendential fall in the rate of profit a mechanical prediction and a theory of the fatal collapse of capitalism have been greatly mistaken over what this tendency means.
- 12 It is rather Foucault who committed the sin of determinism by confining Marx in the horizon of his century and underestimating the effects of his untimeliness.
- 13 Maurice Blanchot, 'Les trois paroles de Marx', in *L'Amitié* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971).

22. End and Continuation

- 1 'Nothing should be called natural, so that nothing can pass as immutable' (Bertolt Brecht).
- 2 André Suarès, 'Puissance de Pascal', in *Valeurs et autres écrits* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2002), p. 15.
- 3 Heinrich Heine, postface to *Romancero*.
- 4 Then the editorial initiative of the collection 'La Discorde' with Textuel, and, starting in 2000, the magazine *ContreTemps*.
- 5 The initial appeal was signed by Gilles Perrault, François Maspero, Thierry Jonquet, Jean-François Vilar, Didier Daeninckx, Georges Labica, Philippe Pignarre, Edwy Plenel, Alexis Violent, Hervé Delouche, Vincent Jullien, Michael Löwy, Enzo Traverso and Michel Lequenne.
- 6 A formula less strange than it appears. Lenin's *The State and Revolution* is a text of clearly libertarian inspiration, confirmed by his own behaviour on the eve of the October insurrection.
- 7 André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972), p. 289.
- 8 See Gopal Balakrishnan, *The Enemy: An Intellectual Portrait of Carl Schmitt* (London: Verso, 2000).
- 9 On the theme of the wager, see Lucien Goldmann, 'Le pari est-il écrit pour le libertin?', in *Recherches dialectiques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967).

23. And Yet . . .

- 1 Henri Michaux, *Les Grandes Épreuves de l'esprit* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966).
- 2 Istvan Mészáros, *Socialism or Barbarism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001).
- 3 Lionel Jospin, *L'Invention du possible* (Paris: Flammarion, 1994), p. 179. In 1998, Albin Michel asked me for a book in the form of a polemical summary of the first months of the Jospin government. I wrote at that time: 'After the disaster of the Mitterrand years, a new defeat in terms of unemployment would have unpredictable consequences on the country's political landscape and on the future of the left' (p. 9). As for the participation of the Communist Party in this government: 'Perestroika à la française may also lead to an implosion. In this event, Robert Hue will have been only a bonsai version of Gorbachev' (p. 266). No need to be clairvoyant. Daniel Bensaid, *Lionel qu'as-tu fait de notre victoire?* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1998).
- 4 Laurent Fabius, *C'est en allant vers la mer . . .* (Paris: Seuil, 1990), p. 9. As for the Communist parties, unable to settle accounts with their past and explain themselves over Stalinism, they have undergone a slow decline and death, trapped in the world of yesterday, appealing to a refoundation without foundation and a renewal with nothing new.
- 5 We were also heirs to those indomitable fighters of a generation now coming to an end. In the last few years, gatherings at Père-Lachaise or the Montmartre cemetery have included last farewells to David Rousset, Pierre Naville, Yvan Craipeau, Marcel Bleibtreu, Rodolphe Prager, Daniel Singer and Stanislas Tomkiewicz. The last of these Mohicans are now very few.

[Yvan Craipeau, 1911–2001, an oppositional member of the Jeunesse Communiste from 1928 onwards. He worked for Trotsky's secretarial team during his French exile.

During WWII he took charge of the production of the clandestine *La Vérité*. Secretary of the PCI (which united three of the Trotskyist groups in 1944), he quit that party in 1947. He was later the driving force behind a youth movement against the sending of troops to Algeria, and took part in the leadership of the Nouvelle Gauche, UGS, and PSU. He wrote his memoirs and a (partial) history of Trotskyism in France.

Rodolphe Prager (Rudi), 1918–2002, born to a German mother and Hungarian–Jewish father in Berlin. A member of the Red Falcons in Germany, then his parents headed for Paris in the early 1930s. In the Socialist Youth from 1931 and then a Trotskyist until his death, from the Jeunesses Socialistes Révolutionnaires to the Comités Communistes Internationalistes, PCI and LCR. In the latter part of his life, he worked as a historian, notably republishing the texts of the Fourth International's congresses (1930–52) in four volumes with La Brèche.]

6 Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, pp. 284–5. [Translation modified.]

DANIEL BENSÂÏD (1946–2010) was a founder member of the Ligue Communiste and a leader for many years of the Fourth International as well as one of the most well-known Marxist philosophers in France. His many books include *Walter Benjamin, sentinelle messianique*; *Jeanne de guerre lasse*; *Eloge de la politique profane*; and *Marx for Our Times*.



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